ISSUE 4 VOICE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNISTS

DIRECT ACTION

FIGHT INFLATION! EXPROPRIATE AND NATIONALISE OIL + CAR INDUSTRIES
FIGHT INFLATION! NATIONALISE THE BIG MONOPOLIES
FIGHT INFLATION! DEMAND FREE "OPEN-ENDED" WAGE AGREEMENTS
FIGHT INFLATION! DEMAND THAT AL NATRUAL RESOUR
WHAT DO THE U.S.A

All Going Up but the Wages

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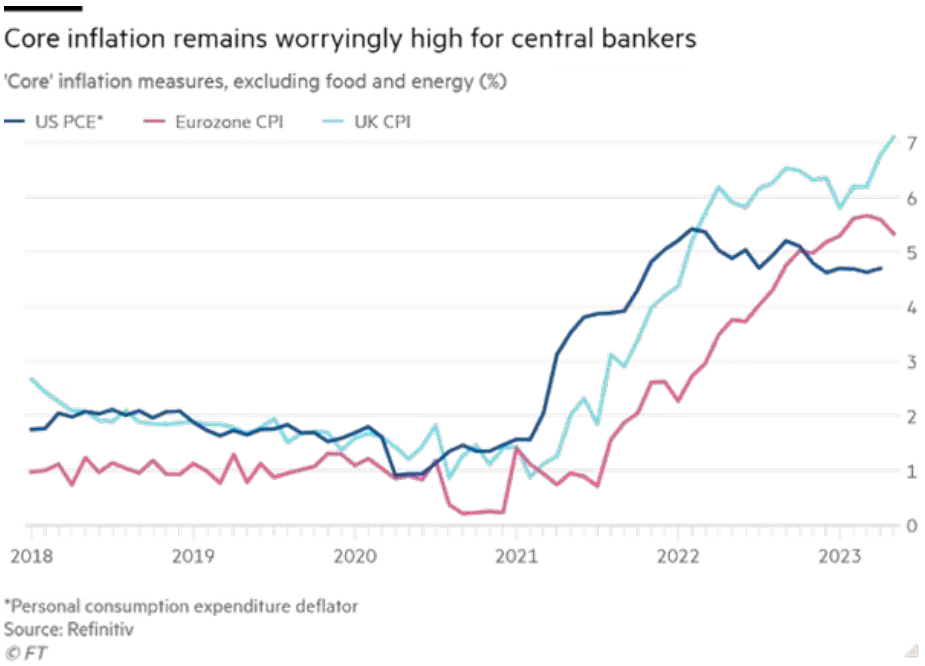
Direct Action is the monthly newsletter of the Revolutionary Communist Organisation, an organ of theory and practice.

Greedflation to Stagflation and then Slumpflation

Global economic growth is slowing. There is a global manufacturing recession already in place: the latest surveys of economic activity in the major economies show that there is an outright contraction in manufacturing in all the major economies – and it is getting worse.

US ISM manufacturing index (score below 50 means contraction)

But inflation of prices outside of food and energy, the so-called core inflation rate, is not falling in the major economies.



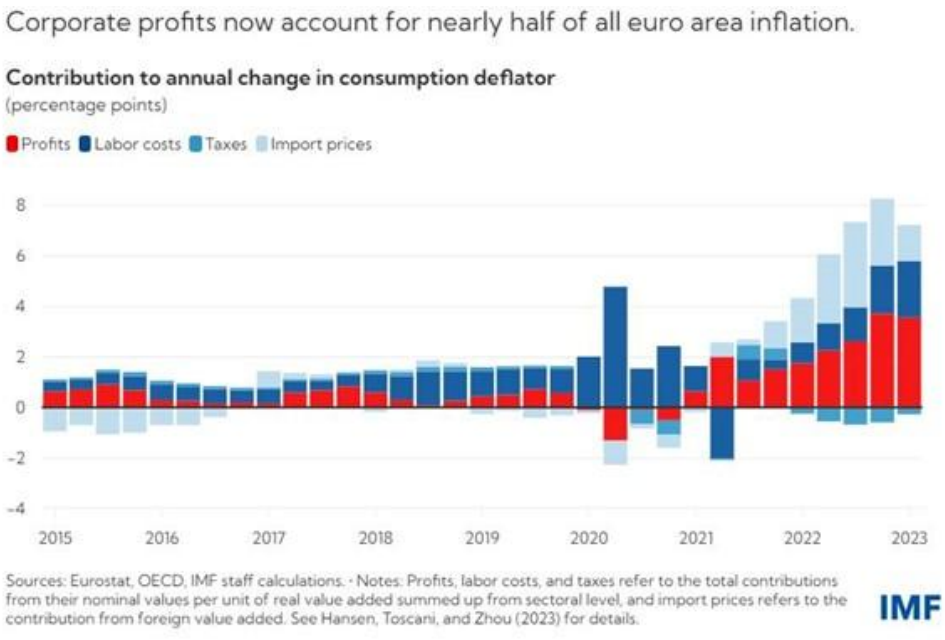
Central bank chiefs continue to shout the mantra that interest rates must rise to reduce 'excessive demand' in order to get demand back in line with supply and so reduce inflation. But the risk is that 'excessive' interest rate hikes will accelerate economies into a slump before that happens and also engender a banking and financial crisis as indebted companies go bust and weak banks suffer runs on their deposits.

The stock markets of the world remain sanguine and head up to highs based on the view of investors that a 'soft landing' will be achieved ie a decline in inflation to the central bank targets without a substantial contraction in investment, output and employment.

Yet all the portents remain that the major economies face a new slump ahead. First, inflation remains 'sticky' not because wage rises (or spending) from labour have been 'excessive', contrary to view of central bankers and mainstream economic pundits. As I and others have argued before, it is the poor recovery in output and productivity coupled with a very slow return to international transport of raw materials and components that kicked off the inflationary spiral – not workers demanding higher wages.

If anything, it is ‘excessive profits’ that have driven up prices. Taking advantage of supply chain blockages after the COVID pandemic and shortages of key materials, multi-national companies in energy, food and communications raised prices to reap higher profits. The case for ‘sellers inflation’ was kicked off by analyses by Isabelle Weber and others that forced even the official monetary authorities to admit that it was capital and profits that gained while labour and nominal wages took the brunt of the cost of living rises.

The ECB and the IMF have since published reports admitting the role of profits in inflation. The IMF joined the growing chorus that inflation was really driven by rising raw material import prices and then by rising corporate profits, not wages.



“Rising corporate profits account for almost half the increase in Europe’s inflation over the past two years as companies increased prices by more than spiking costs of imported energy.” This contradicted the claims of the heads of the US Federal Reserve and the Bank of England that a ‘hot labour market’ and wages were the drivers of a wage-price spiral.

The trendy phrase in vogue is ‘greedflation’, implying that companies had greedily hiked the margin between costs and prices to boost profits. But the evidence for increased profit margins is dubious. Profit margins are high in the US, but after peaking at the end of 2022, they have been falling back since.

In a new study for France, Axelle Arquié & MalteThie found that price rises were greater where firms had ‘market power’ and this explained ‘sellers inflation’: “in sectors with higher markups, prices increase relatively more: in the least competitive sector, firms pass through up to 110% of the energy shock, implying an excess pass-through of 10 percentage points. In addition, we find that the association between markup and pass-through is even higher when markup dispersion is low, consistent with the argument that firms engage in price hikes when they expect their competitors to do the same.”

On the other hand, in the UK there appears to have been no increase in the profit share of corporate output value.

The Bank of England economist Jonathan Haskell also argued that there is little evidence that rising profit margins are the main cause of accelerating inflation. In the three years since 2019, average prices for consumption goods have increased 16.8% in the UK, 13% in the US and 14.7% in the Euro area. Of that increase, labour costs contributed about half the rise in the UK, 60% in the US and 40% in the Eurozone. The rise in profits contributed only around 30% in each area. What was interesting is that when productivity growth (TFP) fell (as in the UK) that raised prices much more.

Table C: Decomposition of cumulative change in consumer prices, 2019 Q4 to 2022 Q4
Percent and percentage points [a, b]

Component	UK	US	Euro area
Consumer price inflation (%)	16.8	13.0	14.7
Nominal labour costs	8.8	10.1	5.7
Nominal capital costs	3.6	5.1	5.0
TFP	1.6	-1.7	-0.2
Unit taxes	1.8	0.6	1.2
Unit subsidies	-2.1	-0.2	-1.4
Terms of trade	2.4	-0.8	4.2
of which: import price	6.3	-0.4	NA
Other	0.7	-0.2	0.2

Sources: BEA, BLS, EU KLEMS, Eurostat, OECD, ONS, author's calculations.

So is it a profits-price spiral or a wage-price spiral? This question has led to an intense debate between mainstream economists and more heterodox ones, although the ideological division has been blurred with some on both sides of debate: is inflation a 'sellers inflation' or 'greedflation' from the corporations; or is it the result of 'tight' labour markets allowing workers to hike wages and force companies to raise prices; or is it, as the monetarists argue, just too much money supply chasing too few goods?

Whatever the case, the IMF is worried that as workers try for higher wages to compensate for rising prices, "companies may have to accept a smaller profit share if inflation is to remain on track ." Similarly, the Bank for International Settlements talks about this in its new Annual Economic Report. "The surprising inflation surge has substantially eroded the purchasing power of wages. It would be unreasonable to expect that wage earners would not try to catch up, not least since labor markets remain very tight. In a number of countries, wage demands have been rising, indexation clauses have been gaining ground and signs of more forceful bargaining, including strikes, have emerged. If wages do catch up, the key question will be whether firms absorb the higher costs or pass them on."

Here the arch-monetarist BIS hints at the need for companies to "absorb higher costs" by accepting "lower profit margins." But as it points out "Should wages increase more significantly—by, say, the 5.5 percent rate needed to guide real wages back to their pre-pandemic level by end-2024—the profit share would have to drop to the lowest level since the mid-1990s (barring any unexpected increase in productivity) for inflation to return to target."

Either way, the debate has switched to whether the central banks should continue to increase interest rates to try and get inflation down to the arbitrary target of 2% or instead let inflation stay higher and for longer rather than provoke a slump.

Arch Keynesian, Martin Wolf in the Financial Times made it clear where he stood. As a true Keynesian, he wanted 'demand' driven down at all costs. "We are seeing a price-price and wage-price spiral radiating throughout the economy. The only way to halt this is to remove the accommodating demand. In other words, the question is not whether there will be a recession; it is rather whether there needs to be one, if the spiral is to be halted. The plausible view is that the answer to the latter part of this question is "yes". Like it or not (I certainly do not), the economy will not get back to 2 percent inflation without a sharp slowdown and higher unemployment."

Wolf concluded that "In sum, rates may have to rise again." Should governments help households with the rising cost of borrowing and servicing debt? "The answer is: absolutely not. that this would defeat the object of the exercise, which is to tighten demand. If fiscal policy were to offset this, monetary policy would have to be still tighter than otherwise. If the desire is to moderate the monetary squeeze, fiscal policy should be tightened, not loosened." So Wolf advocates both fiscal and monetary austerity.

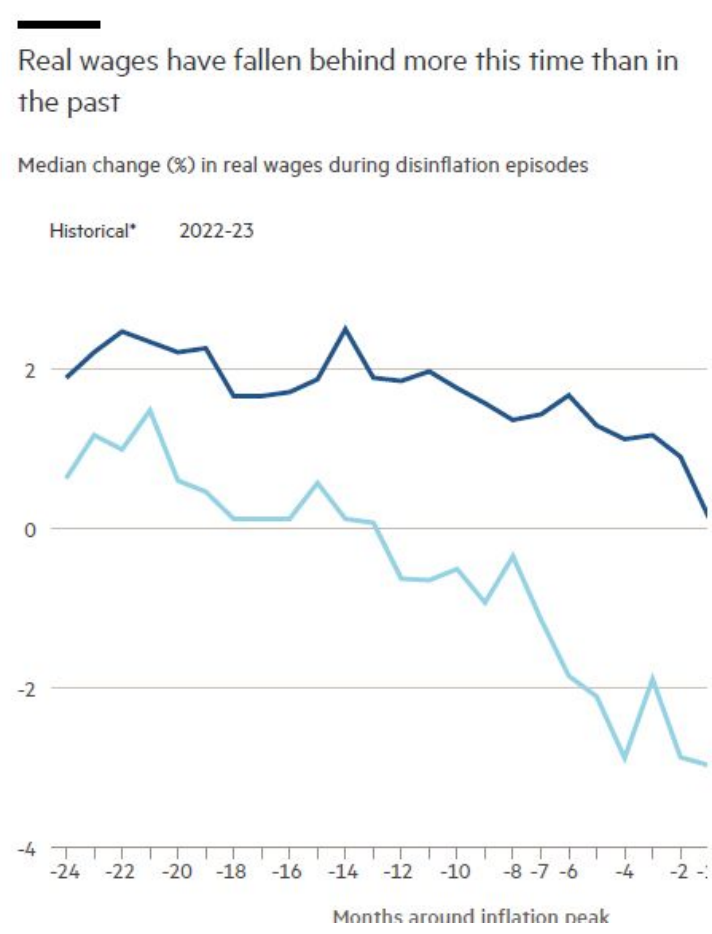
You see, he said, we cannot accept a relaxation of the target for inflation because if "a country abandons its solemn promise to stabilise the value of the currency as soon as it becomes hard to deliver, other commitments must also be devalued." Here Wolf repeats the view of Keynes himself on inflation: "Lenin was certainly right. There is no subtler, no surer means of overturning the existing basis of society than to debauch the currency." This expresses the fear of economies with weaker currencies compared to the dollar – not just the UK, but particularly all the 'emerging' economies currently deep in debt distress. Whichever is tougher on austerity can avoid a weak currency and inflation but instead get a deep slump. It's trade-off for many countries.

The austerity option upset the maverick former Bank of England chief economist, Andy Haldane who wrote: "the textbook role of monetary policy is to tolerate, not offset, these temporary inflation misses provided inflation expectations remain anchored. Not to do so inflicts unnecessary further damage on growth", he claimed in opposition to the central bank chiefs and Wolf. So what if there is higher inflation: "at 3-4 per cent, inflation no longer enters the public consciousness. there is essentially no evidence it would impose costs that are any greater than at 2per cent. But the costs of lowering inflation those extra few percentage points, measured in lost incomes and jobs, are larger at these levels of inflation. Squeezing the last drops, at speed, would mean sacrificing many thousands of jobs for negligible benefit." So let's tolerate higher inflation.

As he put it: "Imagine a doctor, uncertain about the nature and severity of a disease, who has administered a large medicinal dose which has yet to take effect. Prudence would cause them to pause to see how the patient responded before doubling the dosage. That principle is one central banks should heed now to avoid overdosing the economy." So let's wait and see and let inflation take its course, he argues. But that means a longer and higher cut into living standards for workers as inflation stays higher and longer.

Star liberal leftist economic historian, Adam Tooze was equally affronted by Wolf's orthodox position. "The angst now is about inflation persistence. Getting it back down to 2 per cent is the battle-cry. As it was half a century ago, this is a profoundly conservative political argument dressed in the garb of economic necessity. So this is where we have arrived in 2023: to bring inflation back to 2 per cent while preserving the banks, common sense insists that we need higher interest rates for longer, plus austerity. And, at this point, you have to ask whether western elites have learnt anything from the last decade and a half." The call for austerity was "the old neoliberal logic of "there is no alternative". Tooze argued that "in pursuit of lower inflation, monetary austerity risks the same fate. It is time to steer the stampeding herd away from the cliff edge, for the sake of the financial security of millions of people and the credibility of our policy institutions."

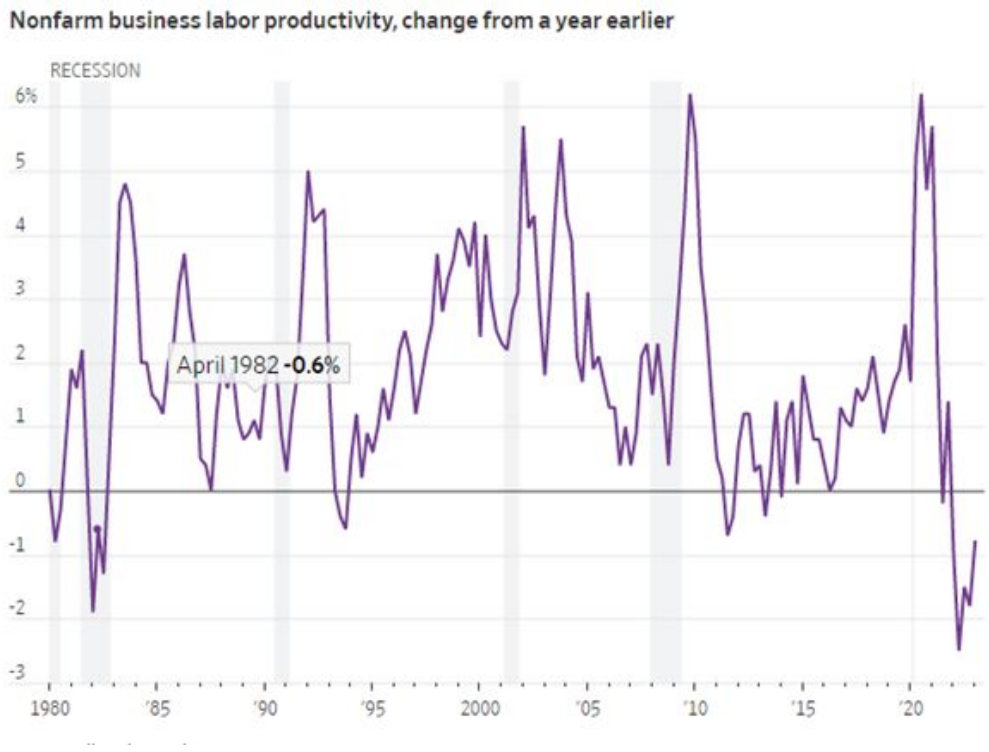
So argument goes on among central bankers and economists. But what is missing from all this is what caused inflation to rise in the first place and why it stays 'sticky'. The recovery in output globally has been weak since the end of the pandemic. Growth in the productivity of labour (output per worker) has been low. Indeed in value terms (ie hours of work) supply has been flat or falling.



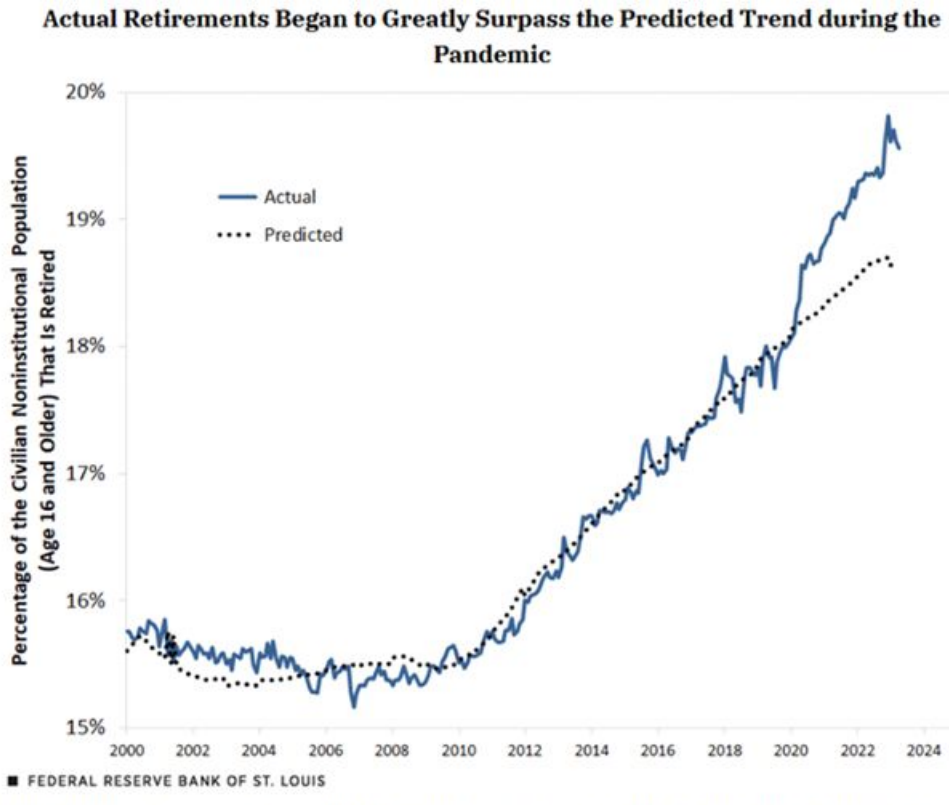
As a result any increase in spending or credit has ended up adding to price inflation. But nobody mentions that it is the failure of capitalist accumulation to boost the productivity of labour (and value creation); instead the argument is about whether labour or capital should take the hit; or whether inflation should be allowed to stay high or be driven down despite the risk of slump.

The BoE data above reveal that the lower is productivity growth, the higher is the sticky' core inflation rate. And as the BIS also said above, inflation won't come down without a slump unless productivity growth rises sharply.

Let me remind readers of the state of US labour productivity – and remember the US is the best performing major capitalist economy.



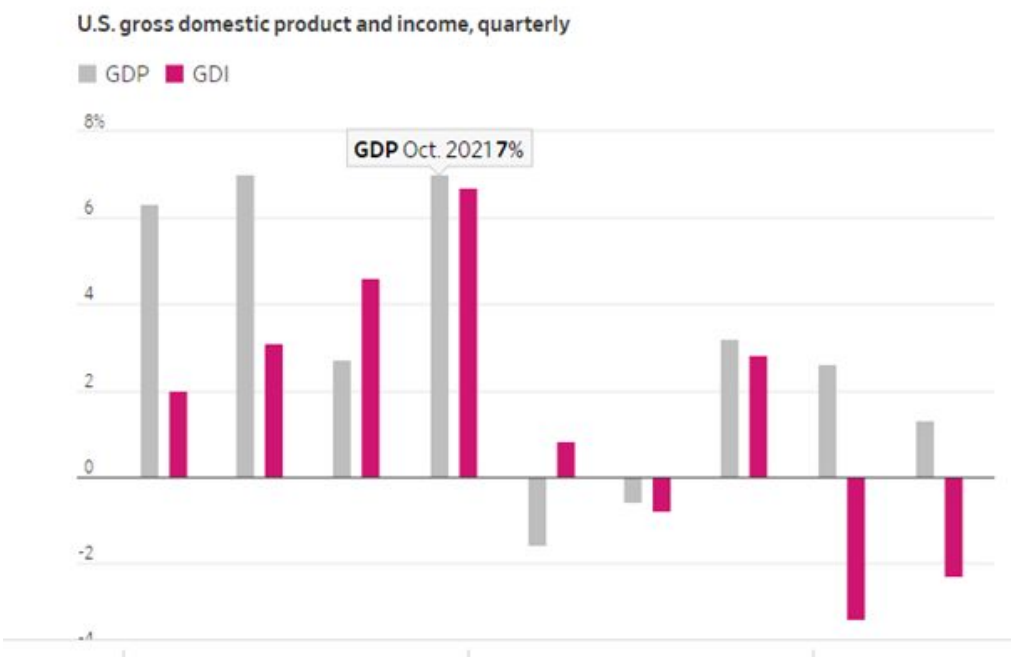
The reason the US labour market is 'tight' is not because the economy is expanding at a fast rate and delivering well-paid jobs for all. It is because so many skilled people of working age have left the labour market since the pandemic. Researchers at the St. Louis Fed estimate that the US has about 2.4 million "excess" retirees above the previously normal pace. If correct, that's almost enough to explain the drop in participation rates.


Actual Retirements Began to Greatly Surpass the Predicted Trend during the Pandemic
Percentage of the Civilian Noninstitutional Population (Age 16 and Older) That Is Retired
20%
19%
18%
17%
16%
15%
Actual
Predicted
2000
2002
2004
2006
2008
2010
2012
2014
2016
2018
2020
2022
2024
FEDERAL RESERVE BANK OF ST. LOUIS
NOTES: The retirement shares are computed using Current Population Survey microdata with weights adjusted for changes in population controls as a result of the 2020 census. The model predicting the retirement share follows Montes, Smith and Dajon, 2022. Data are seasonally adjusted using the X13-ARIMA-SEATS procedure from the Census Bureau.

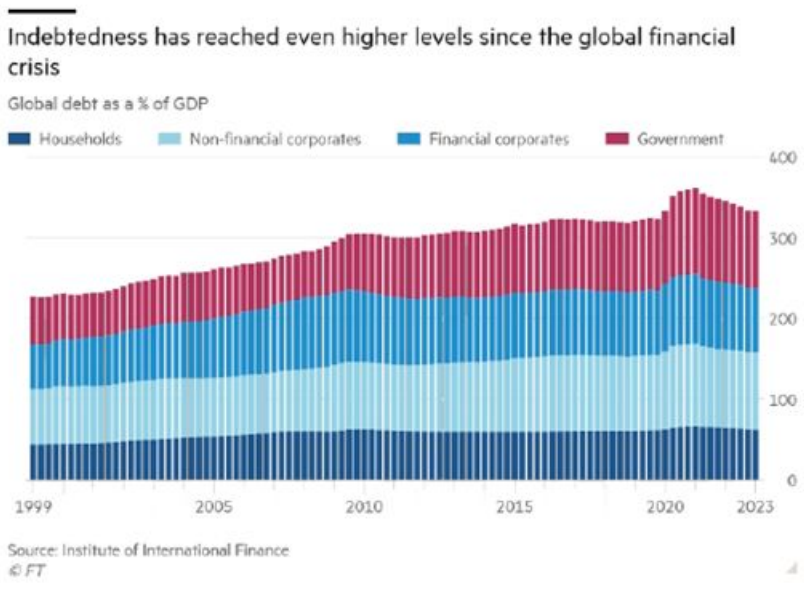
Also immigration, a key driver of labour supply has diminished as many countries apply yet more restrictions. And so far, AI technology is not delivering faster productivity growth from the existing workforce.

Why is productivity growth not appearing? It's because investment in technology is not picking up; instead companies prefer to find cheap labour even from a 'tight' labour market. Why is investment not picking up? It 's because the profitability of capital is still low and has not seen any significant shift up – outside of the small group of mega companies in energy, food and tech.

And while US real GDP has risen, that is not reflected in domestic income growth. There is a significant divergence between the gross domestic product (GDP) and gross domestic income (GDI). That divergence is due to both wages and profits (after inflation) falling. So, on a GDI basis, the US economy is already in recession.



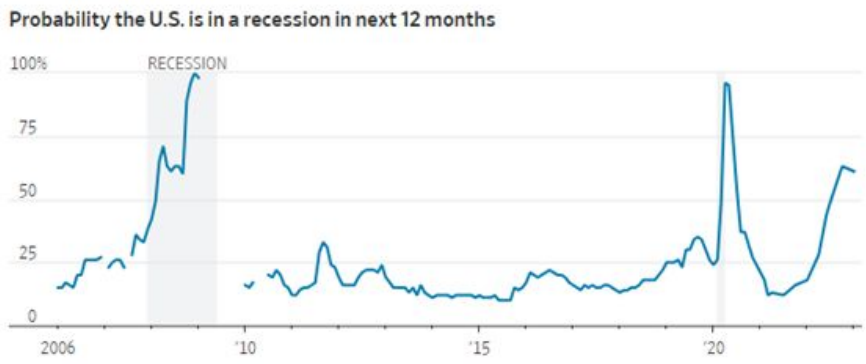
Way back, I reckoned that the next recession would not be triggered by a housing bust or a stock market bust, or even a financial crash, but by increasing corporate debt costs, driving sections of the corporate sector into bankruptcy – namely 'fallen angels' and 'zombie companies'. Corporate debt is still at record highs and whereas the cost of servicing that debt was comfortable for most due to low interest rates, that Is no longer the case.



The squeeze between falling profits and rising interest rates is tightening. We have already seen the impact of rising interest rates on the weaker sections of the banking system in the US and Europe. A record amount of commercial mortgages expire in 2023 and are set to test the financial health of small and regional banks already under pressure following the recent failures of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank. This year will be critical because about $270 billion in commercial mortgages held by banks are set to expire, according to Trepp—the highest figure on record. Most of these loans are held by banks with less than $250 billion in assets. In a recent paper, a group of economists estimated that the value of loans and securities held by banks is around $2.2 trillion lower than the book value on their balance sheets. That drop in value puts 186 banks at risk of failure if half their uninsured depositors decide to pull their money.

US Treasury Secretary Yellen is not worried, as she says the recent Federal Reserve 'stress tests' on banks showed that all could take any hit to capital from rising rates. But the tests also showed that the three banks that went under last March would have passed those tests! Chicago Fed President Austan Goolsbee compared the potential coming impact of the Fed's 5 percentage points in rate increases to the unseen hazards faced by Wile E. Coyote, the unlucky cartoon character. "If you raise 500 basis points in one year, is there a huge rock that's just floating overhead...that's going to drop on us."

And the pundits remain worried. Their estimate of a probability of a recession in the next 12 months is at 61%, historically high outside actual recessions.



Whatever the cause of rising inflation and whatever the argument over whether to keep to inflation targets, the major economies continue to slide towards a slump; the Eurozone is already there; and the US is going there whatever the stock market thinks and whatever the authorities claim. Far from a soft landing, it will be from stagflation to slumpflation.

Michael Roberts

History and Class Consciousness: A Communist Triumph

György Lukács, perhaps one of the most important Marxist thinkers of the 20th century, composed one book in particular that could be pointed to as his magnum opus. History and Class Consciousness, a collection of essays written between 1919 and 1922, covers a breathtaking array of vital topics. Sometimes wrong, sometimes right, and always insightful, these essays analyse and summarise Orthodox Marxist revolutionary theory, class consciousness, reification, classical philosophy/bourgeois antinomies, Historical Materialism, Rosa Luxemburg's marxism, and the problem of organisation. To cover each topic written by Lukács would be overly-lengthy and pointless - reading the text will give you a far more powerful grasp on the points raised by Lukács. Rather, we shall go through the text retrospectively - applying modern historical context and elaboration by thinkers beyond Lukács' time. Although this will certainly remain, in the last instant, a book summary and (at points) review, we must also seek to understand Lukács' own philosophical basis and understanding before delving into the thoughts and analysis expressed throughout his essays.

Championed as one of the founders of Western Marxism, Lukács is heralded as a vital contributor to the Humanist Marxism of the early 20th century, not to be confused with the Marxist Humanism of 1970s France railed against by Althusser. Although both share common theoretical lines, Althusser's battle against Marxist Humanism was more to do with its opportunistic, revisionist nature at the time. Drawing a continuous line of thought from young Marx to the Marx of Kapital, Lukács utilises a "humanist" understanding throughout his analysis and writing. Rather than theories of Marx's epistemological break as posed by marxists such as Althusser, Lukács maintains Marx's connection to Hegel and his supposed supersession of the classical philosopher. Thus, throughout History and Class Consciousness, concepts of alienation, class consciousness, and a greater focus on proletarian struggle are emphasised and important aspects of the text. Lukács further sees Lenin's postulations on party organisation and the role of the party as in line with Marxism and Marxist practice. In turn, Lukács supported the Bolshevik party line of the time against the criticisms of figures likeBernstein, Rosa, andPannekoek (granted, many such figures lended critical support to the Bolshevik revolution).

Lukács' own revolutionary experience, in the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919 (and again in the Hungarian Revolution of 1956), likely further played a formulating role in his positions on the role of the party, the process of revolution, and questions of organisation. Later in life, Lukács became increasingly critical of Stalinist practice and philosophy, asserting it placed "tactics before strategy, practice above theory". Illustrating the importance that Lukács placed on the unity of practice and theory in building a truly revolutionary Marxist movement and understanding. With this brief overview of Lukács personal background and contextual views, we can now begin the exploration of the key theoretical advances presented in History and Class Consciousness, beginning with the definitive essay "What is Orthodox Marxism?".

The Beginning

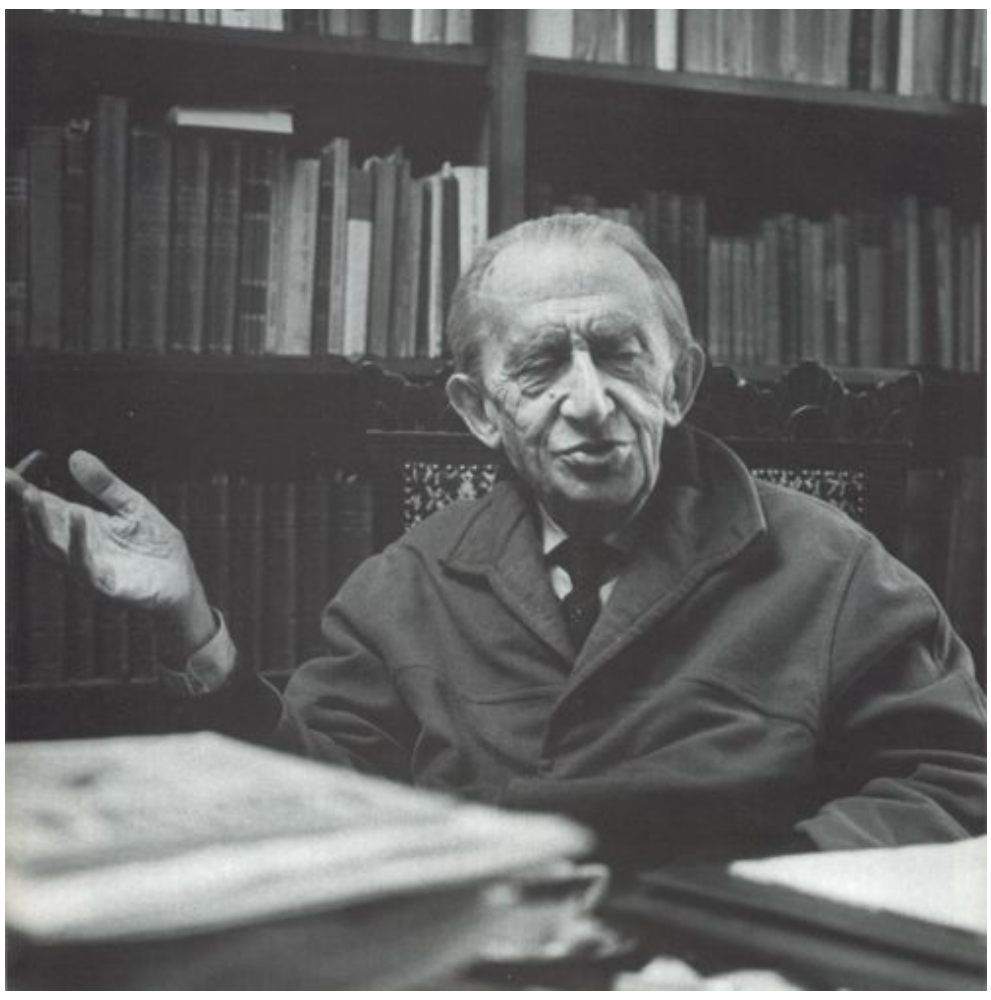
Throughout both "What is Orthodox Marxism?" and History and Class Consciousness as a whole, Lukács thoroughly and consistently champions Orthodox Marxism. To Lukács, Orthodox Marxism refers simply to "the scientific conviction that dialectical materialism is the road to truth and that its methods can be developed, expanded and deepened only along the lines laid down by its founders". For Lukács Orthodox Marxism refers not to any specific, rigid, static ideology, but rather to the shifting beliefs and views that follow logically from the practice of dialectical materialism. Beliefs that follow from the communist acceptance and adoption of the dialectic (and thus dialectical/Historical Materialism) rather than a total rejection of it as seen in the works of Bernstein. Here, Lukács also postulates his belief in the most quintessential dialectical relationship - the one between subject and object in the historical process. Although we may raise issues with his broader characterisation of the proletariat as the "subject-object" of history later on, such issues are to be addressed as they arise.

Throughout this first essay, Lukács rails against economic fatalism, vulgar Marxism, and idealism - all of which he considers to be a rejection of dialectical materialism as a process. Such attacks continue throughout History and class consciousness as a whole, and lends valuable perspective to the communist political landscape of Lukács' time. Lukács asserts further the notion of totality - the whole regarded as one "complete" system rather than splintered into autonomous regions with independence from one another and no overarching structure to speak of. Lukács thus argues all branches of capitalist society are "involved in a dynamic dialectical relationship with one another and can be thought of as the dynamic and dialectical aspects of an equally dynamic and dialectical whole". With such an assertion, we can see further said dynamic and dialectical relations in the works and theories of communists as a whole. Theorists such as Althusser, and his elaboration on the base superstructure

model, offers a perfect example of such dynamic and dialectical relations.

Ultimately, what remains most significant through this short essay is precisely what began it; Lukács assertion and defence of Orthodox Marxism as the application of Historical Materialism. Through such a defence, Lukács illustrates a clear and concrete path upon which many Marxists and communist philosophers have followed, regardless of whether or not they did so consciously. We see here the “orthodoxy” even of communists such as Debord. Despite his rejection or reinterpretation of “principles” such as Vanguardism, the line of thought, and the process of understanding, remains the same. Thus we see in Lukács’ thought a far more flexible definition of Orthodoxy than its stricter, nigh-ideological nature in the modern era..

Armed with the concepts first introduced in this introductory essay, we can continue to analyse and break apart the work further conducted in History and class consciousness as a whole. Throughout the text, class consciousness, dialectical materialism, reification and the question of organisation are perhaps the most vital concepts and themes to appear repeatedly. We must also touch on the fascinating work Lukács’ provides on bourgeois antinomies and classical philosophy, however such concepts remain a topic for another time. We shall instead break apart each main theme as they progress throughout the text, and summarise the conclusions reached.



Above: *Georgy Lukacs*

Class Consciousness

A titular feature of both the text and one of the more significant essays within it, Lukács’ elaboration on and exploration of the Marxist conception of class and class consciousness remains of vital significance to this day. Lukács begins simply by asking how must we communists understand class consciousness theoretically, and what does it mean practically “in the context of class struggle?”. In breaking down this understanding Lukacs illustrates the first “insuperable obstacle” presented by bourgeoisie class consciousness when attempting to interpret the world and history: “apologia for the existing order of things or at least the proof of their immutability”.It is precisely this factor of bourgeoisie consciousness which inhibits its understanding of the totality and comprehension of history. We are thus met further with the errors of bourgeois thinkers due to their class position; namely the belief that the concrete consciousness “can be located in the empirical individual of history” and their “empirically given consciousness”. In the process, Lukács says, such thinkers “mistake something wholly abstract for the concrete.” and ensure a total inability to engage in real societal analysis. Thus Lukács posits once more the concept of “false consciousness” - consciousness that disregards the evolution of society and fails to express it adequately.

Class Consciousness then, for Lukács, is neither the “sum nor the average of what is thought or felt by the single individuals who make up the class”. In this, Lukács separates the individual psyche - the humanistic thoughts, feelings, and emotions - from the objective interests of a social class based on its material reality. In keeping with Marxist understanding, Lukács thus transcends the “narrow prejudices” of individuals, and further concretises the concept of class consciousness. In turn, Lukács emphasises the importance that class consciousness plays in class struggle. Asserting that, in the process of class conflict, a class without a sufficient level of consciousness is doomed to passivity and thus failure. The fate of a class, according to Lukács, depends heavily on its ability to “elucidate and solve the problems with which history confronts it”, and thus resolve its own epoch of class conflict and struggle. Through providing us clearly with a distinction between false and individual consciousness and class consciousness, Lukács does much to dispel classical bourgeois philosophy notions of those things-in-itself responsible for driving forth history and human decision. Rather, Lukács recentres consciousness and reconstructs its utility on the basis of objective economic position and material reality/social structure.

Lukács successfully argues further that, due to the cohesive nature of capitalism in comparison to previous modes of production, class consciousness has far greater significance and potential ;the proletariat “themselves constitute this immediately given historical reality”. In turn however we must

always strive to ask, question and critique this perspective from the modern historical reality and developments in capital. In this case, the argument for the cohesion and comprehensivity of capitalism being greater than previous modes of production indeed holds true - perhaps more true than Lukács could have possibly foreseen. The totalising commodification of all aspects of life, and immense hyper globalisation of the 21st century have unleashed the forces of capital upon every facet of life. This is, of course, represented in part by theories of the spectacle - a concept implicitly expanded upon from Lukács own work on reification.

As the “only pure classes” in bourgeois society, Lukács thus asserts the importance of bourgeoisie and proletarian class consciousness, and emphasises in turn their necessity in regards to the question of organisation (discussed below). Bourgeois class consciousness, in all respects, dominates society and societal understanding. Its own internal dialectical contradictions are precisely a result of the economic positioning and structure of capitalism and the bourgeoisie within capitalism. In turn, Lukács illustrates with the utmost clarity the importance of the bourgeoisie maintaining its control over society in determining and clarifying its class consciousness. At every turn, through theories of economics, sociology, and politics, the bourgeoisie must illustrate clearly its own class position. Yet to do so on the level of totality, of an overarching understanding of all complex parts, would mean the disintegration of the bourgeois class itself. For the proletariat however, Lukács posits the truth as “a weapon that brings victory”. Here we see the objective nature of class consciousness and position for Lukács. Rather than any such subjective, idealistic or revisionist standpoint, Lukács upholds the implicit Marxist Orthodoxy of Historical Materialism and its absolute comprehension of the totality. For Lukacs, the truth of history and class conflict is an objective reality.Thus, influenced by an understanding of the proletariat as the subject-object of history and a perceived connection between Marx and Hegel, Lukács implicitly and continuously asserts the truth as a thing that exists precisely in the class consciousness of the proletariat itself. Historical truth, for Lukács, stems directly from the correct application of Historical Materialism, and thus the logical conclusions of proletarian class consciousness.

The proletariat “cannot liberate itself as a class without simultaneously abolishing class society as such”. Yet, for Lukács, there continues to exist within proletarian class consciousness an antagonism between momentary interest and ultimate goal. An antagonism that must be overcome for the victory of the proletariat to be assured. Thus we see the first formations of Lukács battle against opportunism which remain highly relevant to the modern era. Where opportunists “begin with the effects and not causes, parts and not the whole, symptoms and not the thing itself”, they immediately and ultimately discourage the development of proletarian class consciousness. Opportunism “regards the particular as a valuable achievement in itself”, rather than as a means of “education for the final battle”. In turn, opportunists are mistaking the immediate, psychological consciousness of the proletariat, for class consciousness - for the ultimate goal and total realisation of proletarian interests.

Historical Materialism

Thus in Lukács’ developments on the Marxist understanding of class consciousness, we see also the first glimpses of his elaboration on Historical Materialism as a weapon. Specifically, Lukács sees the role Historical Materialism plays as one fundamental to the development of proletarian class consciousness. Without it, and thus with instead the destruction of the unity of theory and practice posed by vulgar Marxists, the theory is reduced to simple scientific application to resolve social woes. We see here a critical misevaluation on behalf of Lukács. As with many Marxist revolutionaries and writers of the 20th century, Lukács saw the proletarian revolution as being imminent, an almost unavoidable fact. Despite his consistent battle against this ideological fatalism, by bourgeois economists and Marxist revolutionaries alike, Lukács still subliminally falls to this misjudgement Historical Materialism was “one of the proletariat’s most potent weapons at a time when it was oppressed” proclaims Lukács, indicating a belief in the transitioning nature of class struggle to a preparation to “rebuild society and culture anew”. This represents a fatal, if understable, error in judgement.

Despite this, Lukács nevertheless outlines an important potential path for the development of Historical Materialism’s function after the overthrow of the bourgeois state. Proclaiming of this “post”-revolutionary period (we use post only in the sense that such a period would take place after the destruction of the bourgeois state apparatus, not necessarily in the sense that the revolution itself would be finished. There is much to be done after the overthrow of the bourgeois class that still constitutes revolutionary activity), Lukács thus outlines the task of Historical Materialism to be, most importantly, the rewriting of all of history. “The events of the past have to be sorted, arranged and judged from the point of view of Historical Materialism”. Thus, Historical Materialism must be transferred from a sharp weapon of critique and class consciousness into an “authentic method” with which “concrete historical research” can be carried out. Lukács argues that such a transformation can take place only because “the class struggle is now waged from above”, impacting “all organs of the proletariat” and thus requiring an immediate transformation of the weapons

and intellectual outlook of the proletariat.

Although not implicitly linked to Historical Materialism, this also provides an interesting and vital point of organisation. Namely that we cannot, as Marxists and as revolutionaries, allow the weapons, intellectual tools, and praxis of the proletariat to remain unchanged after the overthrow of the bourgeois state. All such tools - be it theoretical or practical underpinnings - must immediately be revised and transformed in accordance with the changes to the very nature of the proletarian class and its material relations.

In the realm of Historical Materialism, such an argument implies that Historical Materialism cannot, and should not, be transformed into an authentic method for historical research. Rather it must remain a theoretical and practical weapon for the continued class struggle waged from below. What this means practically is unclear - even for Lukács. However, a strong argument can be made that such misjudgements on the position of proletarian class struggle and movement of history, and corresponding decisions (consciously or not) distorted the effectiveness of Historical Materialism. Prematurely attempting to transform Historical Materialism from a weapon of incredible importance into a method meant prematurely transforming it under the yolk of bourgeois society and ideology. Attempting in turn to legitimise it in the eyes of bourgeois society - in the process blunting its revolutionary edge and practical underpinnings and turning it into one more analytical tool. Such a tool would be isolatedand discarded by bourgeois philosophy once it touched too close to the inherent antinomies of bourgeois thought and contradiction - a fate that befalls many Marxist theoretical concepts.

In spite of such critical errors, Lukács continues to develop and expound upon his understanding of Historical Materialism throughout the text. Proclaiming Historical Materialism a scientific method of history, one with which the true nature of the events of the past can be revealed, Lukács distinguishes it clearly from bourgeois scientific methods. Chiefly, that Historical Materialism allows the present to be viewed through its historical-context (and thus scientifically). Thus the present can be analysed critically as a key moment in the continuing movement of history rather than the end of history and ideology - a critical extension of class struggle rather than its conclusion. Lukács posits the most important function of Historical Materialism is its ability to “unmask capitalist society”, through utilising the “cold rays of science” upon the lies and obfuscations of bourgeois ideology. While there can be no disagreement on the importance of Historical Materialism in raising proletariat consciousness through the erasure of bourgeois lies, we must make all attempts to analyse and evaluate such a position.

Namely, we must address changes in bourgeois ideology as a whole, and the construction of capitalist society. Its need to constantly revolutionise itself has brought many changes since the early 20th century. The task ahead of Historical Materialism is thus more immense. It not only must correctly assess current capitalist reality, but also address the last century of failures of proletarian class struggle and the development of the capitalist mode of production (regardless of whether its essential character is unchanged). This is a task that requires immense cooperative effort on the part of proletarian thinkers, writers, and revolutionaries, and must be conducted with absolute determination - the truth must be revealed.

Ultimately, despite failures and misjudgements in his own historical epoch, Lukács provides a concrete, clear-cut defence of Historical Materialism throughout History and class consciousness. Doing so in order to mount a total defence of Marxist Orthodoxy, expand upon class consciousness, and analyse the necessity of organisation. What now must be addressed is Lukács’ own crucial developments of the theory of reification. Armed both with Historical Materialism and Marx’s theories of class consciousness and alienation, Lukács successfully and brilliantly expands upon such concepts, separating all aspects of alienation from any such essentialist roots that some proclaim present in early Marx’s work.

Rectification

Lukács’ development of reification is one of his most important contributions to Marxist theory and practice within History and Class Consciousness. Built on the principle of commodity fetishism, Lukács illustrates how an individual proletarian's commodified labour power becomes “something objective and independent of him” through the domination of the commodity form. Thus there is both an “objective and subjective side” to such reification.. The objective being the creation of a world of “objects and relations betweens things”; economic laws seemingly immutable and unable to be changed by individuals. Through the creation of such a world, one governed by markets and capitalist relations, “a man’s activity becomes estranged from himself” - commodified and subjected to the objective economic laws. In turn, such a commodity (in the form of an individual's sold labour power) is removed from their control, separated according to laws of commodity production.

“Thus”, Lukács states, the “universality of the commodity form is responsible both objectively and subjectively for the abstraction of the human labour incorporated in commodities”. In turn “human labour in the abstract... becomes the real principles governing the actual production of commodities”. Such assertions remain demonstratively true today - perhaps even more so. The

commodity form has only sought to increase its universality as far as possible, and commodities exist in such magnitude today it would be unimaginable only 70 years ago. Lukács progresses such theoretical underpinnings further, pointing to the “elimination” of all human, individual, and qualitative aspects of workers from the process of production. Already, Lukács illustrates the vital conceptualisation of the social division of labour - “the process of labour is progressively broken down into abstract, rational, specialised operations so that the worker loses contact with the finished product”. Although prevalent already on the factory floors of the 1920s, we see a dramatic increase in such social division to this day. All tasks are increasingly automated or subdivided into infinitesimal moments in the production process, seemingly disconnected from one another and isolated to individual workers.

Furthermore, Lukács touches on the psychological impacts and process of reification on the individual worker. “Even his psychological attributes are separated from his total personality and placed in opposition to it”, facilitating their “integration” into rationalised systems of work and their “reduction to statistically viable concepts”. In doing so we are once more reminded of the modern relevance of reification - modern bourgeois psychology has only served to further extend such reification on all levels - and we see its presence in all areas of society, ceaselessly pursuing the consciousness of the worker. Lukács points further to the principle of rationalisation and its basis in capitalist economics, “rationalisation is unthinkable without specialisation”, and in the process draws a clear link between the phenomenon of reification and rationalisation.

In Lukács’ development of reification we encounter once more the concept of the proletariat as the subject-object of capitalist production. Lukács details the simple fact that, as the object of production is fragmented through commodity production/rationalisation, so too must the subject be fragmented. “Human qualities and idiosyncrasies” of workers increasingly present themselves as sources of error when compared to the objective, rational natural laws of the production process.”Neither objectively nor in his relation to his work does man appear as the authentic master of the process”, he becomes instead “a mechanical part incorporated into a mechanical system”.

Now we approach the last two impacts of reification.. First, Lukács argues that, through reification/commodification, “time sheds its qualitative, flowing nature”. Following Marx’s writing in The Poverty of Philosophy, Lukács argues that, throughout the commodity production process, time becomes merely a physical, measurable thing. Rather than having a quality of its own or a varying nature, time merely represents the labour-power of an individual put to use. In turn, reification and commodification seeks to destroy all bonds between individuals in a community stemming from the “organic” nature of production as opposed to bourgeois rationalised production. We see here the isolation stemming from reification. As the commodity form dominates all aspects of life, so too do rationalised reified relations between individuals. As rational mechanisation subsumes all of production, “consumer articles” become “abstract members of a species”, “isolated objects the possession or non-possession of which depends on rational calculations”. Thus the hyper-atomisation of the individual proletariat is a logical byproduct of such reification - life becomes wholly reduced to a system of commodified, reified relations and exchanges represented through consumption and production.

Lukács concludes his stunning exploration of the phenomenon of reification with an analysis of the reified consciousness. That is, the way in which the processes of capital as relations between workers lie obfuscated through commodity relations. Commodities and commodity relations no longer become things to be analysed or even given second thought. The “reified mind” regards commodities as its “own authentic immediacy” manifest. The appropriate, and only system with which it is able to satisfy its own needs. The “structure of reification” thus “sinks more deeply, more fatefully and more definitively into the consciousness of man”.

We are greeted at every turn with the modern relevance and importance of Lukács’ developments on reification. Transforming alienation into a far more comprehensive understanding of how commodification impacts the relations, consciousness, and reality of workers, Lukács poses here a vast improvement. These developments remain of vital importance to Marxist understanding today and applying such a theory of reification to the modern era is a task that communists must constantly strive towards. The importance of reification however, must in all instances stem not only from its theoretical application but also its practical. Just as Lukács describes Historical Materialism as a weapon for use in class struggle, so too can reification be used. Rather than a mere analytical tool - a descriptive feature with which we can proclaim “yes this is truly how things are!” - reification holds significant potential in the enhancement of proletarian class consciousness. Through continued use and education on reification, continued employment and exposure to its theoretical language and understanding through propaganda, reification itself can serve to enhance class struggle. When the proletariat is exposed to the very situation they find themselves in, we can tear apart the various obfuscations and illusions of capital.Representing life as it is for many - an instance of reified isolation and alienation - and providing an alternative - the construction

of socialism and end to commodity production - is a powerful weapon of propaganda and agitation. It is one that must not be forgotten, nor underutilised, particularly considering the all-encompassing nature of reification today due to the universal domination of the commodity form.

The Question of Organization

Throughout History and Class Consciousness Lukács mounts a significant and important defence of Leninist organisational strategy. Within such a defence, Lukács emphasis critically both Historical Materialism and the concept of class consciousness. Lukács defends the revolutionary party (the vanguard) as a necessity in heightening such class consciousness of the proletariat and in making clear the inherent contradictions of capital (particularly in times of crisis). He rebukes thoroughly and utterly all traces of economism and fatalism - criticising even Rosa Luxemburg's conceptualisation of revolution as being too reliant on "organic" growth. Thus, Lukács critiques most certainly remain relevant today - providing an excellent elaboration on the importance of party organisation.

Lukács reveals the obvious flaws of economism and fatalism, namely the ones dictating the program and practice of the SPD in his time. Thus Lukács illustrates with clarity the simple fact that proletarian revolution (and its success) isn't a "guaranteed" historical fact and that capitalism won't simply "generate" socialism from its continued development. Rather, the project of socialism necessitates both violent organised revolution and a total departure from capital, rather than its extension. Socialism exists as a continuation of history and a conclusion to class struggle not as a continuation of capitalist development and class society. This in turn plays a vital role in Lukács' emphasis on the revolutionary nature of the revolutionary party. It is not merely a party to facilitate peaceful transition, nor is it a party totally without independence from the current consciousness of the proletariat. Rather, Lukács maintains that the part of the proletariat that "longs for revolutionary leadership" must necessarily "assemble in an organisation", and thus "win the confidence of the great masses".

Lukács further emphasises the importance of class consciousness and the dialectical totality in determining the role of the party. The revolutionary party must always strive to resolve the dialectical relation between the final goal and the movement - between theory and practice. The problems facing party organisation in Lukács' time appear to him as a result of a failure to unify theory and practice, a failure to engage precisely and formulate accurate revolutionary methodology. Lukács asserts that the question of revolutionary organisation and the revolutionary party only becomes immediate with the advent of revolution. Such a question is only forced upon the masses and theorists with the eruption of a revolutionary situation/nigh revolutionary situation, and even then is "only gradually" answered. The experience of the Russian revolution heavily informs Lukács' own conception of how revolutionary organisation should be structured and the necessities within party leadership.

Armed with the necessity of theory-practice unity and class consciousness, Lukácsembarks swiftly on the elucidation of how both party organisation and party criticism should operate. First, Lukács rails against the individualist critiques of whether or not specific leaders were or are correct for specific roles and positions. Although offering perhaps a base level of understanding, Lukács argues it is more important to ask if the strategies employed within such a position were the "right organisational methods... for transforming theory into practice". This position must heavily inform modern revolutionary organisational criticism. It is more vital to criticise the absolute practices of the party as a whole than it is to criticise the election of one individual or another to one position or another. We must incorporate a total understanding into criticism and emphasise the importance of unifying theory and practice as a key principle of organisational movement.

Not only does such a practice apply in criticism but also in party action and movement. The importance of unity between theory and practice is again emphasised by Lukács in party organisation as a whole. It must not be possible, asserts Lukács, for a party to commit to anything remotely close to contradictory positions on various issues. A commitment in theory must also be a commitment in practice and a commitment in strategy and program.Lukács provides Stuttgart's "radical" resolution on war as an example,despite its radical theoretical nature and contents, it contained "no organisational obligations to take into concrete action". Thus opportunistic, revisionist tendencies within the second internationale were able to thoroughly discard such a resolution without fear. No "organisational conclusions" were drawn from it, and in the process, theory and practice were totally disunified. Despite any and all theoretical concerns, without implicit practical commitment in addition to theoretical developments, any revolutionary party is bound to flounder in opportunism and indecision. This is a point that holds continued significance today. It is of the utmost importance for all revolutionary organisations or pre-party organisations to maintain and strive for such a theoretical practical unity. Without it there is no hope of building a truly dedicated, committed revolutionary movement.

Apparent here is the expression of Lukács' contribution to the question of organisation through the events unfolding in the early 20th century. Opposing opportunism as a general tendency on an organisation-wide level and incorporating such opposition into the unity of practice and theory is absolutely vital for Lukács. Lukács opposed the position which saw the struggle against opportunism conceived of as an entirely intellectual inner-organisation A solely intellectual exercise against opportunism, says Lukács, ultimately dissolves all struggle into individual battles - in which the "ally of yesterday can become the opponent of today". Rather than isolating struggle against opportunism to individual battles and failing to eliminate opportunistic tendencies as a whole from the party, struggle must be waged against opportunism as a whole on an organisational level. The very principles that facilitate opportunistic positions, positions of economism, fatalism, and various other ideological faults, must be opposed at an intrinsic level, and practice and education within the organisation must support this. Lukács, further to his credit, does not rule out the necessity of collaborating with opportunistic tendencies in order to further class consciousness either. Rather, he simply asserts the importance of the revolutionary party combating opportunism as a tendency in theory and practice and waging a consistent campaign against such positions.

What then is the purpose of unifying theory and practice and eliminating opportunism? It is the single most important purpose of a communist party: he continued raising and exemplifying of class consciousness. Lukács rejects Blanquist ideology of the communist party fighting on behalf of the proletariat, although accepts that, in the course of the class struggle, they may do so solely to advance the class consciousness of the proletariat. Rather, the communist party is "detached" from the mass of the proletarian class only due the inherent stratification of class consciousness within the proletariat. The communist party is composed of, and led by, the most conscious, most revolutionary members of the proletarian class. Its ultimate goal is to raise the consciousness of the proletariat as a whole above even the consciousness of such revolutionary members. As class struggle is, ultimately, the development of proletarian class consciousness, the victory of the proletarian class itself can only be assured through such development.

If the communist party is to represent proletarian "class consciousness given historical shape" - and is to correctly guide such class consciousness forward - it must maintain an correct theoretical line. For Lukács, this is done through the combination of total organisational cohesion and the flexibility of tactics and organisation. Asserting both aspects are "two sides of the same coin", Lukács praises the necessity of discipline and commitment in all party members. The communist party must, in all instances, be "such a homogenous formation" enforced not through mechanical discipline but social cohesion. One in which all changes in tactics and organisation would mean a change in the tactics and organisation of all individuals involved. "In short, the organisation's sensitivity to changes in direction, increases in the pressure of the active struggle and to the need to retreat, etc., would be raised to its highest pitch". In the process facilitating impactful, efficient self-criticism of the party and the individual, with each change in individual slogan or tactic effectively measured and assessed with ease.

Flexibility is ensured through commitment and homogeneity in the theory and practice of each member and commitment is ensured through the employment of flexible correction of organisation and strategy. Lukács does not shy away from the "capitalist inheritance" of the organisation of the communist party, asserting that "the inner life of the party is one unceasing struggle" against it. Thus Lukács reiterates further that membership within the communist party must not imply duties performed only as duties, but rather activity must "extend to every possible kind of party activity". Existing party hierarchy must be based "on the suitability of certain talents for the objective requirements of the particular phase of the struggle". In the process, Lukács implies further the necessity of flexibility within the party - this time within party leadership. At each stage of the struggle, just as each tactic and form of organisation is reassessed and changed with relation to class consciousness, so too must the party hierarchy be reshuffled. Accountability is placed in both the hands of party leadership and the common member. Each member is to commit their total personality to all decisions made by the communist party, to participate wholeheartedly and commit entirely to such organisation. In the process, all leadership is compelled to make resolutions comprehensible and convince all members of their correctness - for their agreement as active, committed members is a necessity for the unity of theory and practice.

We see clearly the way in which Lukács' answers to the question of organisation have been formulated and the importance placed upon class consciousness and concepts such as reification and Historical Materialism. In this way, Lukács' work represents the beginning of many "traditions" within Western Marxism and understandings of Marxist Humanism. Lukács also represents the first step in the theoretical deepening of concepts which had begun with the works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. The formalisation of these concepts in Lukács' work represents the triumph of this text.

Anthony Furia

Socializing Care: Against Domestic Realism

For Black women today and for all their working-class sisters, the notion that the burden of housework and child care can be shifted from their shoulders to the society contains one of the radical secrets of women's liberation. Child care should be socialized, meal preparation should be socialized, housework should be industrialized—and all these services should be readily accessible to working-class people.

Most socialist, anarchist, and radical feminists of the 20th century believed that the definitive suppression of what we now call patriarchy was inseparable from overcoming the private or individualized domestic economy. Today, however, these debates have disappeared from the political map. Helen Ester, drawing on Dolores Hayden and making original use of Mark Fisher's well-known concept, calls this situation domestic realism. The spatial design of the isolated household in which domestic chores are, in theory, the responsibility of either the adults in the nuclear family or their maids, has become so accepted and commonplace that no one seems able to imagine that we could live any other way.

Of course, this lack of radicalism is not a problem exclusive to feminism. The socialist tendency is generally in low spirits. Until recently, no one on the left seemed to take seriously anything other than trying to save the remains of a zombie social democracy. It is only in recent years that we have witnessed a wave of research on the possibility of a socialist planning of the economy that overcomes the mistakes of the last century. Markets, money, and property, despite decades of media and academic propaganda bombardment, are once again being questioned.

The intention of this brief article is to try to convey the potentialities that these new debates have for the feminist cause, as well as to revive deeper research on this subject. Cybercommunism suggests that planned economies could give rise to alternative ways of organizing social reproduction, the domestic sphere, and care. After a brief review of the history of similar initiatives, we will try to explain how this can be done. But first, we provide a brief introduction on the continuing relevance of these questions.

II

Why would we want to change the way our homes work? Socialist feminism has long been demystifying our homes and explaining that, in addition to filial love, they contain explicit and implicit hierarchies and dynamics of domination.

Capitalism's main sources of wealth are ecosystems and the sale and purchase of labor power. But the latter does not appear out of nowhere like mushrooms.5 It needs protection, food, attention, and education, i.e. care, in order to develop and recover. These tasks are partly performed today by schools and other institutions, but above all by the private family, which has historically been characterized by a sexual division of labor in which women (mothers, grandmothers, sisters, etc.) were in charge of care and men worked to bring home income.6 After the experience of World War II and the entry of women into the world of work, this structure was disrupted but retained its essential form: in addition to their new jobs, women have continued to carry domestic responsibilities, giving rise to the phenomenon of the double burden. They come home from work and begin to cook meals, do the laundry, take care of the rest of the family, clean, and so on. All these activities are undervalued and made invisible. They are rarely given credit, but everyone notices when they are absent.

This situation is bearable for high and middle-income earners, since they can pay for private caregivers, nursing homes, day-care centers, etc., but is relatively untenable for working-class families, where mothers and grandmothers struggle to carry everything forward. The cultural campaigns of the left and other legislative initiatives that equalize maternity and paternity leave have helped to co-implicate men in these tasks, but do not guarantee an effective equitable distribution, and what is worse, they leave intact the problems that individual domestic economies generate at the social level.

What various theorists have rightly called the care crisis is a worldwide social problem that generates incalculable suffering among the population, and should be among the top issues for communists to address. The private household economy is an extremely inefficient institution in the use of time and resources, incapable of adapting to the demographic restructuring that is taking place. The plummeting birth rate, linked to the vital difficulties in achieving job stability, has led to a generalized aging of the population. Mothers and fathers combine double care hours and increasingly low-paid work schedules that result in chronic stress and intermittent neglect of those in need of care. Unable to afford private care services, children and the elderly suffer forced loneliness with serious psychological consequences. The case of the elderly is particularly worrying, as the deterioration of public pensions makes their situation even more dire.

As we stated at the start of the article, this situation has been denounced by the most radicalized sectors of feminism for more than a century. Authors as disparate in time and space as Aleksandra Kolontái -although she did not consider herself a "feminist"-, Shulamith Firestone or Savvina Chowdhury have theorized on the need to organize the domestic sphere communally; to socialize care. While this would not wipe away the rest of the problems feminism addresses, it would make its cultural campaigns much easier and more effective.

III

Despite today's limited historical memory, the fact is that there have been multiple attempts to socialize the domestic. As will be seen, they have all been linked to experiences of socialist planning in which the reconfiguration of urban planning and interior architecture has played a key role.

In the 19th century, different Owenist and Fourierist successors of what is now known as utopian socialism designed housing models in which they experimented with different ways of managing housework. Dolores Hayden's The Grand Domestic Revolution, which recounts the specific U.S. experience with such initiatives, is one of the best works on this topic. In her book, Hayden recounts how the "materialist feminists" of this period are the first to propose that the spatial transformation of the home would give rise to a much more equitable and sophisticated type of housing, technologically and aesthetically, than the typical Victorian bourgeois dwelling. The well-equipped laundries and kitchens of hotels and other commercial spaces exemplified for them the possibility of optimizing their work, so they promoted the formation of communities of between fifty and five hundred people in apartment blocks, large hostels, and rural estates.

In these new cooperative enterprises, called phalansteries by the Fourierists, domestic chores were usually rotated, and the members who worked outside the community environment were entitled to part of their salaries. There were somewhere between 2000 and 3000 communes of this style in the USA. Many of them had a religious orientation and still do, while other communes can be attributed to either the hippie movement or were something like "nests" for workers' cooperatives. In fact, the attempt to create micro-islands of emancipation survives today in the form of so-called "ecovillages," in which participants attempt to use the so-called low tech for these purposes. However, the main problem with these approaches is that they lack a broad socio-political projection and err on the side of being the personal life plan of a few activists. Working women would have to wait for the less idealized but more effective experience of "actually existing socialism" to see large-scale initiatives where integral economic planning was directed towards alleviating the double burden.

In the early Soviet Union, and largely due to the influence of the Zhenotdel (Department of Women Workers and Peasant Women) led by Aleksandra Kolontai and Inessa Armand, women's liberation would take center stage in Bolshevik politics. To this end, they envisioned a society in which soup kitchens, kindergartens, and public laundries would replace women's unpaid work in the home. As Wendy Goldman details in Women, State and Revolution, the women of the Zhenotdel set out to reform society through laws that sometimes clashed with material reality, especially with the traditional structures of the Soviet peasantry as, for example, new divorce laws designed for city life did not adequately address the status of peasant property in common.

One of the most striking ideas of the time, promoted by Kolontai, was the socialization of care for the young and, in particular, for orphans left behind by the war, known as besprizornost. Kolontai saw the socialization of care as part of her program to constitute a higher form of family, and these orphanages seemed indicated to be the first step. Despite the destruction of the war and the lack of resources, numerous care centers were built, where up to a quarter of a million orphans were sheltered (albeit in far from ideal conditions). With the advent of the New Economic Policy in 1922, many of these centers would be closed due to lack of funds and then their real impact would be seen: without these centers, many mothers could not care for their children and work at the same time. Married women stayed at home, reintroducing dependence on their husbands' wages. And many single mothers or war widows would be forced to abandon their children to the streets because they could not combine domestic and work duties.

In 1930, the Zhenotdel would be abolished, as the feminist question was (erroneously) categorized as solved by considering that the elimination of private property, combined with the new institutions of the state, had solved the problems faced by women. Although women's rights would suffer another setback with the entry into force of the family code in 1936, Soviet "welfare state" measures, later extended to other socialist bloc countries, would ease women's lives and enable their incorporation into the workplace by alleviating the double burden. However, as Kristen Ghodsee writes in Second World, Second Sex, sexist ideas would not go away, or be culturally challenged. Women were still expected to do the housework in socialist countries, and the feminist question would be of little importance in almost all the bloc countries except Bulgaria, where there was a mass women's organization that was relatively independent of the communist party and published a newspaper discussing women's concerns.

In parallel, the People's Republic of China pursued its own

path. During the first Maoist period, the collectivization of social reproduction was taken to extremes that were not replicated in other countries, especially in the agricultural communes. One of the objectives of commune construction was the liberation of women from domestic work, and to this end, many of the tasks performed by women, such as education, childcare, and food preparation and distribution, became communal. This last measure was made possible by the opening of around 2.6 million communal dining halls, where people could generally come and eat whatever they wanted. This utopian experiment did not survive long, and sadly the canteens are now known as a cause of the famine of 1958-9. This is mainly because food distribution was centralized in the hands of few people, and faulty implementation and management combined with poor harvests in an already poor and starving country exacerbated the bad situation that existed during the Great Leap Forward. Despite Mao's insistence, the communal kitchens would be dismantled in the early 1960s.

However, many institutions which alleviate the burden of social reproduction, mostly borne by women, from this period would survive to later days. During the Cultural Revolution, a second utopian period would give renewed impetus to collectivist measures, expanding public health care in a country where it was practically nonexistent, although the major focus of this period was to break down the cultural barriers that tied women to domestic work and prevented them from performing many jobs. To this end, measures were taken such as enacting maternity and opening many schools. With the reforms of Deng Xiaoping many of these gains would be reversed at the end of the seventies.

IV

Even though the aforementioned experiences represented notable advances in the situation of women, they presented serious limitations and drawbacks. The utopians' islands of socialism experimented with forms of integral economic planning from which much can be learned, but they fell into the oblivion of their own isolation. The USSR's efforts to develop public services for women were commendable, and while they made life much easier for women than for their Western counterparts, they did not ensure an effective sharing of domestic tasks. The agricultural communes of Maoist China tried to attack the root of these problems in a much more radical way, but in their attempt they overreached and generated forms of life that were perhaps too intrusive and not compatible with the demands of privacy which we today understand as basic.

Nevertheless, intermediate paths aim to bring the best of both worlds. In 1993, Paul Cockshott and Allin Cottrell published *Towards a New Socialism*, a systematic work in which they set out the technical and institutional foundations of a socialist planning of the economy updated by the new digital technologies. In chapter 12, entitled "The Commune," they argue that cyber-socialism and feminism could converge in the revolutionary struggle because of the possibilities that the planned economy offers for the massive proliferation of urban communes. What are these urban communes and why should they be of interest to the feminist cause?

Urban communes are architectural structures that combine the socialization of household chores through dining rooms, laundries, nurseries, and communal cleaning services, etc. with apartments and individual rooms in which families and their members have all the privacy they need. There are several potentialities within them.

In the first place, by assigning tasks to a small group of people, professionalizing them or rotating them among the members of the community, we ensure a mortal blow to the sexual division of labor, which discriminates against women. In other words, by guaranteeing that most of the tasks such as cleaning and cooking are carried out by communal agents who meet the community's criteria, we ensure that this work does not end up falling to our mothers and grandmothers.

Second, we enjoy the benefits of economies of scale. It is much more efficient in terms of time and resources for one person to cook for a hundred people than for each of those hundred to cook for themselves. Also, large scales allow for the application of scientific and technological criteria more easily. By socializing the menu, for example, we can ensure that the members of the commune have access to a balanced diet, as well as invest in better facilities that they could not afford individually. It may seem that this would reduce everyone's freedom of choice, but the key to this is that each urban commune would decide for itself how to implement public recommendations for sanitation and usability. Going back to the cooking example, there are hundreds of thousands of possible recipes that could be valid and there is no reason not to offer several options on the same day.

Children and the elderly would benefit from the communal space even with the falling birth rate, since, by optimizing the management of tasks, more time would be available to care for them, and what is more important: by generating communal spaces for leisure and supervision, we ensure a full social net, from the cradle to the grave, of the entire neighborhood, thus developing much closer relationships.

It is possible that, even after having explained the above, one thinks that urban communes will be apartments in which three or four families live in overcrowded

conditions. To get an idea of what this would imply, it might be interesting to recall the experience of Red Vienna between 1919 and 1934, despite all its limitations.

In Principles of Communism, Friedrich Engels argued that the proletarian revolution should have among its priorities the "construction, on public lands, of great palaces as communal dwellings for associated groups of citizens engaged in both industry and agriculture and combining in their way of life the advantages of urban and rural conditions while avoiding the one-sidedness and drawbacks of each." The government of the Social Democratic Workers' Party did not succeed in abolishing the distinction between town and country, but it built the closest thing to workers' palaces that ever existed; palaces for women workers would be more correct. Huge buildings such as the Karl-Marx-Hof house some 1300 individual dwellings which have access to communal services ranging from laundries and toilets to pharmacies. In all of these, "the utmost attention is paid to common services, to the liberation of women from domestic slavery."

An indication of the potential that these institutions have for the care crisis is that they are still on the horizon of initiatives such as feminist urbanism, which aims to generate these community spaces even within the bourgeois state. But in the context of market economies, where only monetarily profitable initiatives are rewarded, it finds only limitations. It seems no coincidence that the only places where similar projects are being carried out are Venezuela and, particularly, today's China, where the public sector continues to have considerable weight in the economy. The new capsule neighborhoods in regions such as Xiong'an bear striking similarities to the above. On the other hand, the recent "Integrated Community Development Plan" aims to encourage regional administrations to promote the consolidation of integrated communities based on the existing urban fabric. The idea is to develop strategically located communal services within a ten-minute walking distance that are affordable and allow for communal living.

Nevertheless, an essential caveat of feminist urbanism must be emphasized: as authors such as Liisa Horelli explain, the socialization of reproductive work does not automatically dissolve the sexual division of labor. Therefore, cultural campaigns are necessary to prevent communal care services from being performed mainly by women, as well as to make them visible and dignified.

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In short, we are talking about an extremely sensitive subject that requires reflection on very intimate aspects of the social psychology of our world. When these alternatives and their history are discussed today, it is common to observe a certain suspicion that leads to rejecting them outright as soon as one becomes aware of any of their problems. However, it is necessary to emphasize something that is indisputable: even though these proposals were far from perfect, the situation of women worsened -very much- when they were absent. Therefore, it seems reasonable to reflect on how we could learn from their successes, while trying not to repeat their mistakes.

Urban communes should not be taken as the definitive solution to the problems mentioned, but as an attempt to reopen the debate on these issues and combat domestic realism. If socialism intends to return to being a mass movement it must find ways to radicalize the current social movements among which feminism cannot be ignored. To do this effectively, the discourse cannot be framed as a mere attack on the limits of a hegemonic feminism, but as the need to remember what revolution, economic planning and true democracy have to offer to half the world's population.

We need a socialist and feminist urbanism. Socialist, insofar as it is capable of mobilizing time and resources in a planned manner for multidimensional objectives that go beyond profitability, but also productivity, and feminist, insofar as it is conscious of and committed to effectively overcoming the sexual division of labor in the communal spaces generated.

CibCom Collective

The Economic Consequences of Neo-Keynesianism

After nearly four decades of free-market ideology, industrial policy has returned to America in the form of an octogenarian president who barely knows what year it is.

In the words of the Biden administration, the time has come for a "modern American industrial strategy." So-called Bidenomics, encompassing the American Rescue Plan, the Infrastructure, Investment, and Jobs Act, the CHIPS and Science Act, and the comically-named Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), indicates a shift in the government's willingness to intervene directly in the national economy. While huge government subsidies for corporations and tax incentives to attract foreign investment are nothing new, the government's rationale—using its fiscal power to shape the economy's productive and technological structure—is genuinely new. Such economic statecraft would have been denounced as heresy by most politicians and pundits a mere five years ago.

Instead, liberals are beside themselves. Robert Kuttner of The American Prospect celebrated the death of neoliberalism:

> *We now have the first post-neoliberal administration in power in Washington. The Biden administration has explicitly disavowed all aspects of neoliberalism, including the assumptions about free trade and the alleged efficiency of outsourcing, the lack of support for trade unions, and the bipartisan contempt for industrial policy ... Biden managed to get through Congress the most expansive technology and industrial policies since World War II.*

With his willingness to nudge private investment in certain directions, the somnolent commander-in-chief appears to be embarking on a bold new course for the American experiment. Or perhaps Bidenomics is less a departure from American precedent than a revival of it, a retrieval of the Hamiltonian tradition of the national developmental state reaching back to the founding of the country: "Biden's economic team is betting on something Hamilton knew: Long-term investment in the real economy is essential, but private investors might not provide it. That's where government can—and should—step in," opines Alex Yablon at Vox. With the Vox stamp of approval, industrial policy has officially entered the realm of conventional Beltway opinion.

Whether industrial policy is a radical new experiment or a tradition as American as mass shootings, liberals are not the only ones excited about it. Its assumption that the government has a key role to play in actively guiding investment in a more productive, competitive direction can now be found across the political spectrum—for instance, in the fake working-class politics of Florida Senator Marco Rubio's report, American Investment in the Twenty-First Century. Rubio is a key figure of "national conservatism," an ideology that embellishes the standard defense of plutocracy with a superficial rejection of the same free-market dogma people like Rubio were credulously preaching just a few years ago. Evidently, after three decades even the children of the Reagan Revolution are discarding the usual pablum about the wisdom of markets in favor of yesterday's heresy: more government guidance of the economy.

Criticism of the new orthodoxy has been scarce, but not completely absent. In a blog for the New Left Review, the sociologist Dylan Riley threw cold water on the whole prospect of Bidenomics. Taking the March bailout of Silicon Valley Bank as a point of departure, Riley claimed that "the SVB collapse is a beautiful, almost paradigmatic, demonstration of the fundamental structural problem of contemporary capitalism: a hyper-competitive system, clogged with excess capacity and savings, with no obvious outlets to soak them up," and that "the current vogue for 'industrial policy' will do nothing to address this underlying issue." Consequently, socialists have no business supporting Bidenomics or any other industrial policy for that matter: instead, "the commanding heights of the economy...must be seized all at once."

Despite helpfully solving the problem of socialist strategy, Riley's polemic provoked a flurry of rote Keynesian responses criticizing his ultraleft politics and emphasizing the role of demand as a policy variable. Writing for New York magazine, Eric Levitz pointed to the high rate of US profits, as measured by the US Bureau of Economic Analysis, as evidence against Riley's contention that overcapacity is suppressing them. "More broadly, overcapacity cannot exist in anything but a relative sense," he added, "the world does not have more productive capacity than is required to satisfy all the wants and needs of its 7.8 billion people." The problem, Levitz suggested, is one of "inadequate demand." Similarly, the economist J.W. Mason criticized the theoretical basis of Riley's overproduction story, claiming that it—unjustifiably—takes demand as a static variable, just as, conversely, mainstream economics usually takes supply as a given factor, unalterable by human activity. Besides, political realities should trump political purism. Rather than dismissing Bidenomics from the standpoint of some idealized socialist movement, progressive activists should welcome it as the flawed but long-awaited arrival of post-neoliberal governance, which for better or worse will form the terrain of political conflict in the years to come. And in the end, isn't any climate policy better than none?

Considering the content of the IRA, that's actually debatable. The IRA— billed by its cheerleaders as “the most important climate action in U.S. history”—provides billions in tax credits to generate domestic consumer demand for US-made electric vehicles, along with a host of other measures to incentivize emission reductions and clean energy manufacturing. It also hands out truly massive subsidies to the oil and gas industries, locking in continued windfall profits for oil oligarchs—“courageous visionaries,” in the words of US Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm—and environmental degradation at the public’s expense for decades to come.7 At the moment, it is unclear if the legislation’s decarbonization measures will even balance out the historic pipeline permit it just handed to the fossil fuel industry not just to continue, but to escalate its campaign to doom human civilization. Beyond the IRA, the speed with which the Biden administration has approved new drilling projects has left even Trump’s cretinous lackeys of industry in the dust.

That’s not all, though. A key feature of the IRA is its brazen protectionism for US electric automobile manufacturing, which predictably set off alarm bells in Brussels and Seoul, whose exports the Act is explicitly meant to shut out. As a plainly mercantilist policy with the goal of raising US growth at the expense of its competitors, the IRA is already triggering an international arms race toward general mercantilism, with the European Union rushing to implement its own protectionist subsidies. The South Korean government, already acting against its own economic interests to accommodate the US’s trade war against China, was shocked by the US’s apparent willingness to economically decimate a critical ally in its anti-China coalition. It has since enacted a new round of subsidies for its domestic industries and is currently considering even bigger ones. Japan is following suit. With the IRA’s beggar-thy-neighbor consequences, the US is happily forming a circular firing squad with its supposed “allies,” with signs afoot that a global race to the bottom in protectionism is already underway. This makes the prospects for global cooperation on the climate crisis even bleaker than they already were.

Liberals hail Bidenomics as a vindication of Keynesian politics. Finally, it seems, the government is getting serious about its national economic role. Many of the same people applaud Washington’s new anti-China consensus and the US ruling class’s campaign to subjugate a country of 1.4 billion people to its whims. Perhaps Keynes himself would have agreed. But it is more likely that the internationalist author of The Economic Consequences of the Peace, who excoriated Allied leaders after the First World War for their narrow self-interest and myopic nationalism, would have been appalled by these policies. Keynes, who “though an Englishman, [felt] himself a European,” vehemently opposed the Paris peace treaty, seeing clearly that the Allied prostration of Germany would lead to a cataclysm that would make the Great War pale in comparison. He understood that whatever short-term advantages it gave to France and Britain would be far outweighed by the negative longer-term consequences it baked in for human civilization, which would not be long in coming. What would he have made of the world’s premier superpower blowing up the very international order it designed and oversaw for the better part of a century in a frantic attempt to suppress a country with a population some fifteen times larger than Germany’s, all for a few tenths of a percentage point of GDP?

Crucibles

In fact, the self-defeating qualities of US policy reflect the larger global environment that seemed to make Bidenomics necessary in the first place. This is particularly evident with regard to climate sustainability commitments. Governments across the world are discarding the laissez-faire, free trade rulebook of yesteryear, actively manipulating their economies, and doubling down on fossil fuels in a bid to raise their international competitiveness. In this context, pledges to achieve carbon neutrality count for little.

A brief survey of the global situation makes this abundantly clear. In Mexico, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador shuns investment from US and Canadian clean energy companies, effectively discarding the US-Mexico-Canada trade agreement and opting instead to champion Mexico’s state-run oil firm (Pemex) and Federal Electricity Commission. AMLO’s government pursues a policy of energy sovereignty—not unlike the US’s own preoccupation with energy security—that invests in petroleum and coal with little room for renewables. To the south, Brazilian President Lula da Silva has committed Brazil to serious progress on the development of clean energy resources following the environmentally catastrophic regime of his cartoonish predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro. At the same time, he has vowed not just to halt the planned sell-off of state-owned firms but to strengthen the government’s control over them, including the Brazilian oil giant Petrobras and the country’s central bank, in a bid to lower fuel prices and “reindustrialize” the economy. Lula’s government plans to disconnect the price of fuel from world dollar markets, to “Brazilianize” the price of gasoline, and to invest in more oil refineries and natural gas as part of an integrated energy policy.

In the European Union, French President Emmanuel Macron has declared his own intention to embrace more government planning in the energy sector to make France more “energy independent,” and is the most outspoken voice for an EU-wide industrial policy to counter the US’s IRA, which could throttle continental industry. To his east,

the German government has implemented price caps on its natural gas and electricity supply funded by a tax on profits in the green energy sector— i.e., taxing renewables to subsidize carbon fuel consumption, especially for its all-important export sectors. The intervention undermines the country's commitment to achieving carbon neutrality, not to mention the sanctity of market forces, but German industry needs cheap fuel to remain competitive.

To the west, across the battlefields of Ukraine and the vast expanse of the Kyzylkum and Karakum Deserts, India, the world's third largest carbon emitter behind the United States and China, has flatly refused to endorse a net-zero carbon emissions target. Narendra Modi's government has consistently ranked the development of the economy as the higher priority. This can hardly be a surprise: India's private capitalist sector has nearly become moribund, staying alive mainly through continuous lavish funding from government subsidies as investment and productivity have cratered over the last decade. In East Asia, Japan is the only G7 country currently planning a major rollout of coal power, which already accounts for 32 percent of the country's energy supply, over the next decade. And lastly, the Chinese government has pledged that the country will be carbon neutral by 2060, and China is the world's largest producer and exporter of wind and solar energy. Yet, as part of the government's efforts to power a national economic recovery following the pandemic, the country is currently burning more coal than the rest of the world combined.

The global trend is plain to see. Virtually everywhere, redoubled consumption of fossil fuels is undercutting the possibility, already remote, for countries to meet their long-term commitments to carbon neutrality. Everywhere too, governments are directly intervening in their national economies through price controls, trade restrictions, industrial subsidies, and targeted investments to transform their productive infrastructure, measures that would have been unthinkable not so long ago, when official doctrine held that markets knew best and governments should just get out of their way. It would appear that neoliberalism is dead and buried, replaced by the very thing it was supposed to have definitively ended: state-directed economic development.

What accounts for this stunning reversal? In one plausible explanation, a crisis of legitimacy has unfolded through a series of destabilizing political and economic shocks in the G7 countries over the last fifteen years, forcing the policy elite to learn from their mistakes. The devastating aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, and the lack of any real recovery from it, provided the soil from which so-called populist challenges sprang forth from the right and the left over the ensuing decade, shaking the political establishment from its complacent stupor. Trump was the exclamation point of this sequence. After stumbling into office following his surprise electoral victory, the Trump administration proved far too erratic and unpredictable for the traditional wards of the American state, particularly its foreign affairs, national security, and monetary policy wings, all of whom feuded with Trump throughout his tenure. The bumptious but entertaining blowhard was not only an insult to their self-regard as a benign meritocracy; he also personified the de-legitimation of the entire political system, exposing it as a playground for a ruling class of oligarchs and sociopaths like himself. During the pandemic, the national George Floyd uprising of 2020 and the invasion of the Capitol building by a QAnon mob in January of 2021 sealed the deal. For the federal government's career administrators this was an intolerable outcome that could not be allowed to happen again.

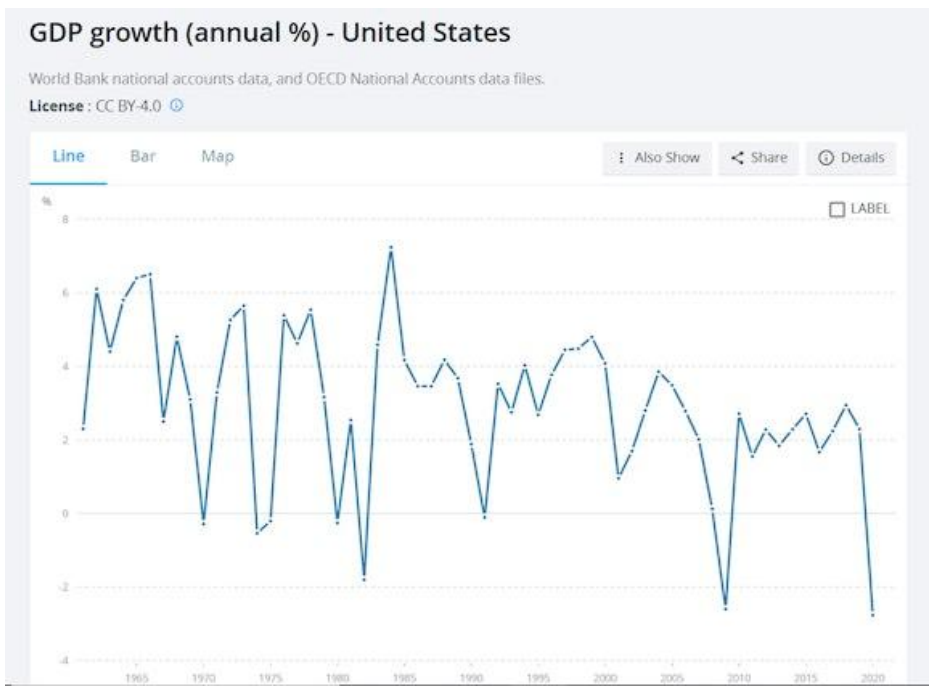
But it was Trump's government that provided the proof of concept for what would become Bidenomics. It started with an incompetent trade war launched against China in the spring of 2018 and pursued through 2019. With the arrival of COVID-19, emergency measures like fast-tracking vaccine research, relief packages with direct aid to families, and (largest of all, of course) a firehose of central bank funding for distressed businesses beyond the central bank's usual remit demonstrated that debates over a larger fiscal role for the government were moot, because it had already become a reality. At the same time, over a decade of near-zero interest rates and persistently low inflation suggested the government had more room to maneuver than previously believed. With the accession of the Biden administration, US executive leadership decided the time had come to turn the page on failed economic policies prescribed by an obsolete ideology, and experiment with bigger, bolder roles for federal spending to address its festering legitimation crisis at the source.

These events shook the paternalistic clique that runs the government to its core, giving it a newfound sense of the precarity of its grip on power. But this account leaves the most important questions unanswered. Why, first, did the world economy never really recover from the events of 2008–2009? One could say that the rich countries sabotaged themselves through a self-defeating obsession with austerity following the meltdown, and that growth would have reached a healthy clip had the return to statism come sooner. But this doesn't explain why the country that did follow that path, China, also experienced a pronounced growth slowdown over the same decade. In any case such explanations are ultimately pointless, because "policymakers" don't decide what to do based on the better argument; they do what they usually do until it either causes or can't resolve a crisis, at which point they begin to improvise. They simply were not going to do anything differently until it was painfully clear that the old,

neoliberal playbook had not worked.

More fundamentally, this nationally-focused narrative doesn't adequately explain the advent of the new Cold War, which has accompanied the return of industrial policy from the start. While politicians are always looking for scapegoats for their failures, the US demonization of China and its economic warfare against that country are on a different level than this. They reflect a strategic decision to undercut that country's further development in order to preserve American preeminence, a decision reflecting the assumption that the global economy cannot accommodate both American growth and Chinese development. Prosecuting economic—and, probably soon, military—warfare against China is not incidental to Trumponomics and Bidenomics; it is not a hawkish foreign policy attached to the domestic economics, which could be pried away from it by conscientious reformers. Rather, it is integral to the economic program, baked into it by the correct judgement on the part of US leaders that in the current, decelerating global economic environment, national growth must come at the expense of other nations.

Lastly, the national crisis narrative cannot explain the most remarkable, improbable fact of all: faced with an escalating, comprehensive domestic crisis, the US government has opted not to renovate the international order it has led since 1945, its own bespoke system of market-led trade that it designed in its own image, but to demolish it, ending nearly eighty years of liberal internationalism buttressed by the universal expansion of markets, free trade, and open capital flows. In the form of Bidenomics, the US response to the crisis of neoliberalism has abolished the very basis for its claim to world leadership since the end of the Second World War, which was to stand for something larger than itself—to represent the center of a cosmopolitan political order sponsored by the American state. The worldwide return of industrial policy marks the end of that project, and the definitive end of an entire era of US-led world capitalism. To understand this stunning historical outcome, and what it portends, we need to look beyond a narrowly national explanation to the dynamics of the capitalist system as a whole.

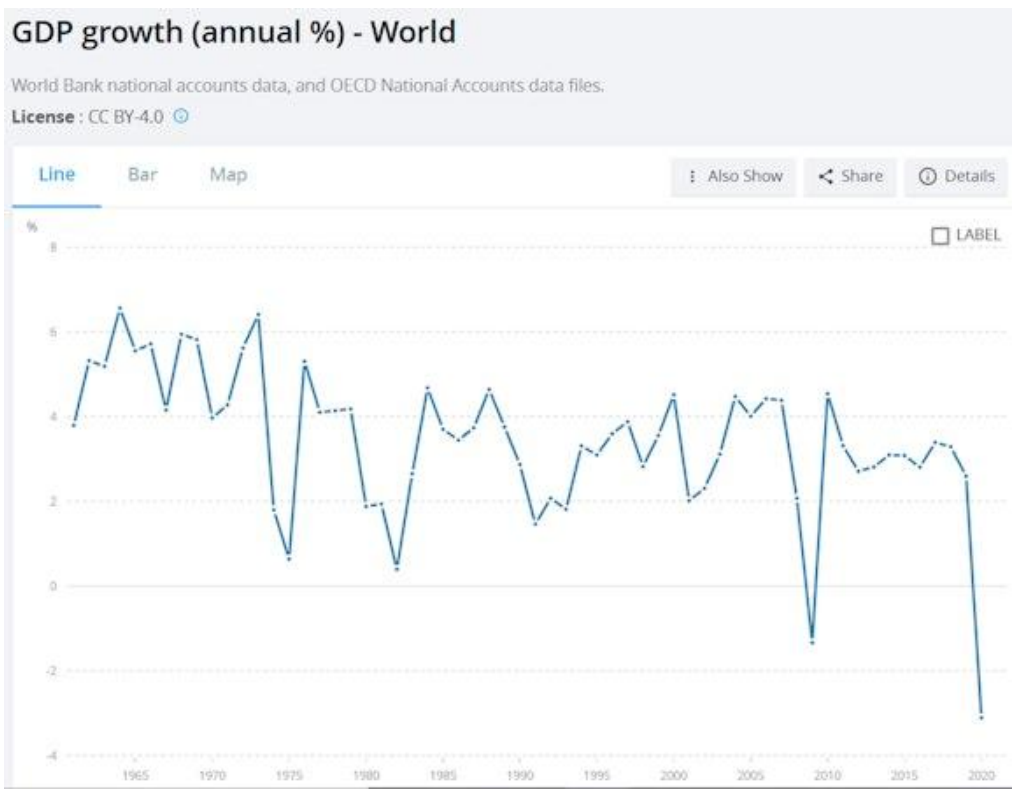


Decalescence

GDP growth rates, crude as they are, offer an initial clue. First consider US growth rates from 1961–2020 as measured by the OECD and World Bank.

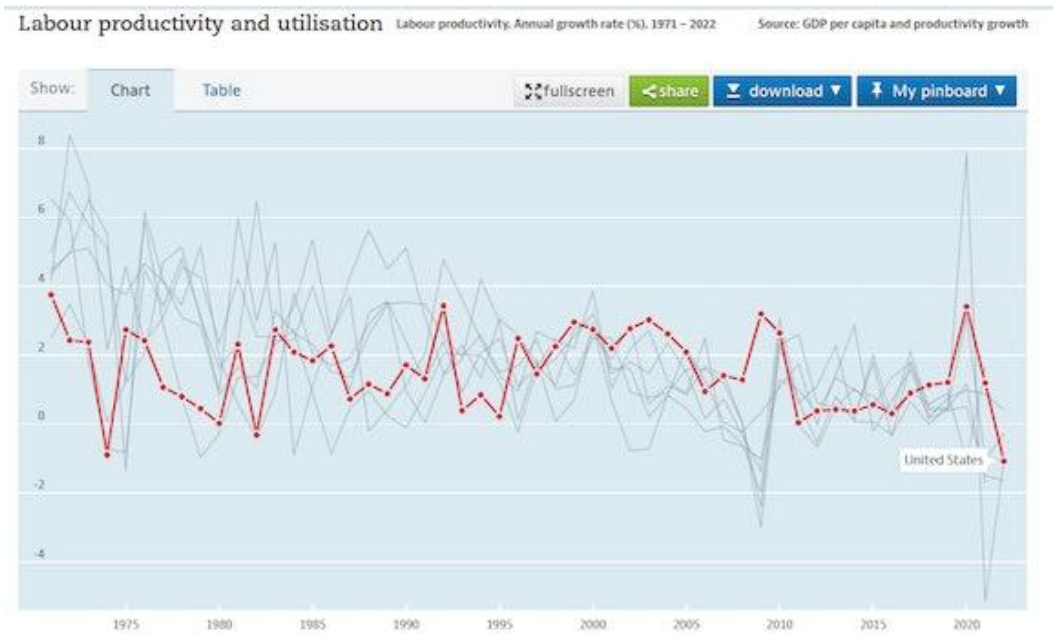
As is evident, growth is cyclical, passing through the ups and downs of periodic business cycles, through which a clear downward trend works itself out. With each turn of the cycle, over time the peaks get lower, and the troughs deeper, to the point that from the decade spanning 2010 to 2020 the US could barely manage a roughly 2 percent rate of growth.

Now consider the world economy over the same period. World GDP growth mostly mirrors the US trajectory. Although higher in absolute terms, its ups and downs reflect the fluctuations of a single world business cycle whose peaks and troughs, as for the U.S., both trend steadily lower over time. The decline traverses the "golden age" of post-war capitalism, its demise, the emergence of globalization, the end of the first Cold War, the rise of China, everything up to the eve of the coronavirus outbreak of 2020.

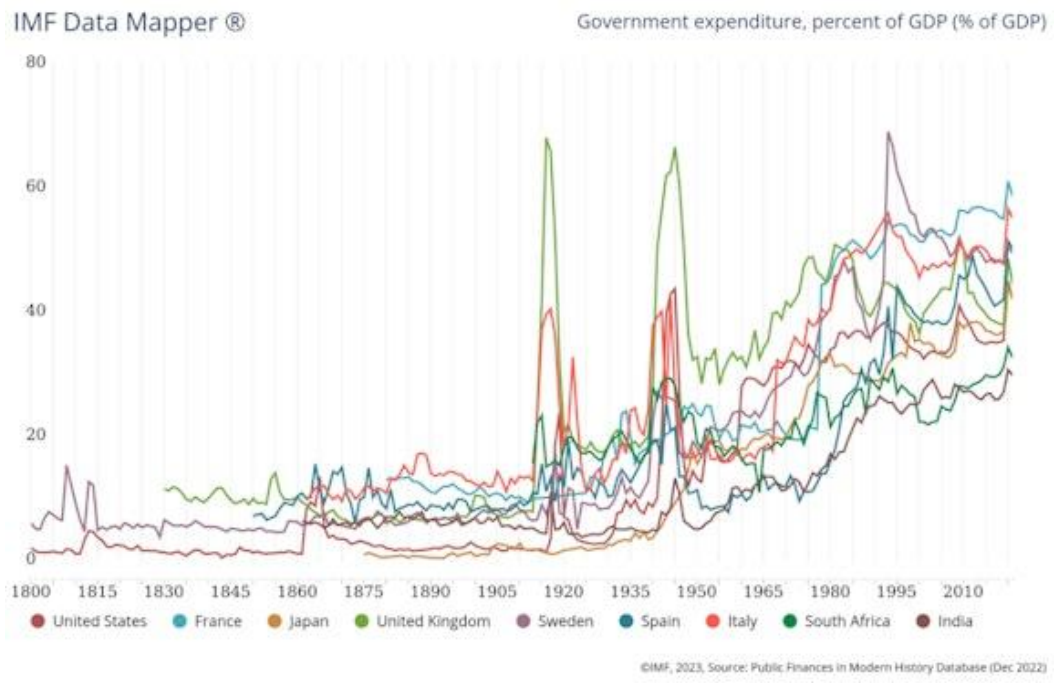


Labor productivity rates for the G7 economies, derived from OECD data, show a clear compression over time, converging on the same, narrow range fluctuating between 0 and 2 percent from 2008 to 2020, or outright flatlining for much of that period, as in the U.S (highlighted). Among other things, declining productivity means wages and salaries can only increase by cutting into corporate profits, so for profits to remain high workers' incomes must be assiduously suppressed. For some hopeful commentators, the post-pandemic recovery seemed to hold out hope for a long-awaited productivity revolution in the making, reflected in a modest bump in the data for 2021. Alas, this turned out to be a false dawn,

as the advanced economies quickly reverted to trend. As the Conference Board observes, stagnating productivity is likely to persist for the foreseeable future.



Finally, maybe most strikingly, this global decline has been accompanied since the 1940s by steadily rising rates of government expenditure as a percentage of GDP, with government spending in both advanced and less developed economies accounting for somewhere between 40 and 60 percent of GDP. Rising levels of state spending accompany ever more anemic levels of growth and output. Again, this continued uninterrupted from the middle of the twentieth century all the way to now. Against this trend, the recent rediscovery of industrial policy is a mere blip.



Economic statistics should be taken critically as the shaky constructions they are, but they do tell you something. Industrial policy has made its worldwide comeback within an equally worldwide exhaustion of the global economic system, the slow-motion expiration of the US-based configuration of capitalism inaugurated at the close of the Second World War. On the surface, Bidenomics seems to represent a decisive break with neoliberal dogma, and so it is in some respects; but more fundamentally, it is smoothly continuous with the deeper trend, starting in the 1940s, of fading growth prospects and rising state involvement in the private economy. If anything, it is an intensification of this trend. Its official adoption represents the belated recognition by "policymakers" that still greater state action is needed to sustain the already meager growth rates of the national economy, crushed beneath the dead weight of an expiring system.

Transitions

US decline is not due to China, or any other one country, but to the fading vitality of the greater international economy made in its own image, and to which its fate, as the core of that system, is irrevocably chained. This secular decline is behind the legitimation crisis that has engulfed all of the advanced economies over the last decade and a half, as well as the stalling growth afflicting the so-called emerging economies. It is the background for the abandonment of economic liberalism and the revalidation of state-guided development in the eyes of political establishments worldwide.

In a world in which growth is scarce and ideas scarcer, industrial policy has made a comeback not as a pathway to some egalitarian, post-carbon social democracy, much less some long-awaited government revelation that people should matter more than profits. Rather, it returns as a strategy that capitalist countries are forced to adopt to defeat one another on the shifting stage of global competition. Its return to fashion in official discourse signals a distinctive feature of that competition in the current moment: a constantly expanding footprint of national states in both domestic and international corporate economies. As economic growth dries up, states are compelled to abandon the usual platitudes about free trade, openly calling for the kinds of aggressively nationalist, beggar-thy-neighbor policies that the capitalist world was supposed to have left behind. The different national forms this takes—Bidenomics in the US, Germany's Industrial Strategy 2030, China's Made in China 2025, India's MII (Make in India) initiative, and so on —are all particular instances of a single, structural transformation of the world economy into a fragmented state-capitalist hellscape. As with all great ideological shifts in the political establishment, the official hype for industrial policy is mostly an after-the-fact recognition of a process that is already well underway.

Dylan Riley and Robert Brenner have coined a concept that at least tries to grasp this transformation, which they label "political capitalism." Initially outlined in "Escalating Plunder," an essay published by Brenner in the summer of 2020 in New Left Review and later re-upped in Brenner and Riley's "Seven Theses on American Politics," political capitalism is allegedly a "new regime of accumulation" in

which profits no longer come from investment in businesses but from peddling influence in the political process. Business elites enrich themselves by pushing for easy money policies on the part of the government, which politicians are happy to oblige as a way to secure their own power. It amounts to "the politically driven upward redistribution of wealth to sustain central elements of a partially transformed dominant capitalist class, as the response to a seemingly inexorable process of economic deterioration," a process supposedly induced by worsening industrial overcapacity at the global level. Exactly how this happens is not clarified, as the concept is derived through an exclusive focus on the US. In fact, despite referring to it as a "new regime of accumulation," in neither of these essays do Riley or Brenner turn more than a perfunctory glance at the global situation, and how the US fits into it, content instead with vague references to falling returns from chronic overcapacity.

To briefly sketch Brenner's now classic theory, as originally laid out in The Economics of Global Turbulence: overcapacity is driven by a problem of continuing entry with insufficient exit in world export markets. Faced with the entry of more technically advanced, lower cost competitors from Germany and Japan in their markets, legacy producers in the US with high fixed capital costs in plant and machinery chose not to divest from those assets to efficiently reallocate their capital, but to recommit to them by shifting the burden of competition onto labor and raw material costs to compensate for now out-of-date productive equipment. Eventually, the new competitors themselves faced heightened competition from newer entrants into their fields, clogging world export markets with even more extraneous industrial capacity than before. The process repeats, resulting in permanently falling industrial profits driven by always excessive competition between industrial producers.

As astute critics pointed out from the start, what Brenner offered was not so much a theory as a historical description of market failure. His narrative encompasses the world economy, but as an aggregate of individual, competing units, with no prior analysis of the dynamics of the capitalist system itself, nor an account of how the changing nature of competition expresses those dynamics. Instead, once overcapacity set in, stagnation was assured; it is ultimately a static conceptualization of the world system. Not only does this leave out an explanation for why world markets have apparently failed to clear for decades on end, but more importantly, it reduces politics to an equally static story about predatory state elites, since capitalist social relations are supposedly no longer a defining feature of the economy. With only vague allusions to the economic forces behind all this, political capitalism is basically indistinguishable from banal libertarian whining about "crony capitalism," which is based on a similar claim that government corruption erodes the basis for the capitalist economy to function. Both views elide the system's dependence on profits extracted from the exploitation of labor, which, pace Brenner, is still the basic foundation of the economic system.

Profits in particular have become a topic of some confusion among leftwing commentators responding to the overcapacity story. For example, Tim Barker and Eric Levitz both point to official government data on the profits of American businesses, which since the 1980s have shown a cyclical pattern and have even risen slightly, to question Brenner's claim that systemwide profitability is stagnating. With Brenner and Riley offering only a parochial focus on the US, with no real economic analysis, this is the obvious and inevitable objection. But the rate of profit for the capitalist system as a whole is a global magnitude, which affects each producer and each nation unevenly, based on their relative position in the world economic hierarchy. As expressions of this hierarchy, national rates of profit reflect the relative success of state strategies to secure continued profitability for its affiliated corporations both domestically and abroad, largely at the expense of their competitors.

Such as it was, the neoliberal profits recovery in the US was accompanied by an epochal expansion of credit, a consequence of the country's transformation into a global debtor following the deep depression and spiking interest rates of the early 1980s. These attracted a huge amount of the world's money to its financial centers and marked the beginning of a dramatic expansion of government debt to its current level of 130 percent of GDP, climbing steadily since 1980, and the continuing growth of nonfinancial corporate debt, currently at 85 percent of GDP. By borrowing to fund endless tax giveaways, corporate subsidies, runaway military spending, and a general credit boom for businesses and consumers, the US secured the conditions for consistent profitability through the constant expansion of debt. As a direct consequence of the skyrocketing interest rates unleashed by Fed Chairman Paul Volcker, lower income countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia were laid waste by the Third World Debt Crisis of the early 1980s, a cataclysmic event from which many of them never really recovered. These countries were and continue to be starved of billions of dollars of potential investment as much of the world's wealth is absorbed by the enormous market for US government debt. Now the cycle is poised to repeat itself as a result of the Federal Reserve's frantic attempt to get inflation under control by jacking up interest rates to their highest levels in decades, with a world debt crisis once again poised to pulverize a wide swathe of low-income countries across the Global South.

At the dawn of the neoliberal era, much of the world had to be wrecked as a condition for the US to begin its transition to a credit-based national recovery. But while

credit can facilitate profitability it is not the source of it. Along with exciting new techniques for tax avoidance opened up by globalization, not to mention the government's open support for the corporate assault on organized labor that began in the early 1980s, US profit growth over the last several decades also expressed the globalization of production, with US multinationals leveraging their position as global monopsonies to enforce competition between subcontract manufacturers exploiting workers in international production chains. The symbiosis between these producers, mainly located in East Asia, and the credit-fueled US consumer market was the flywheel of global growth throughout the neoliberal period. But as this growth engine sputters out, and with US mercantilism now openly aiming to steal investment away from other countries, credit-based profit growth in the US increasingly means condemning the majority of humanity to economic purgatory, as the self-designated leader of the "international community" (again) absorbs the world's money to fund its national growth strategy. While the U.S. is currently importing more capital from the rest of the world than ever before, levels of global FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) are now below the level they were at in 1995.

As the US case amply demonstrates, governments intervene constantly to maintain a profitable environment for investment, but by doing so they gradually sap the vitality of the total economic system. This will, in turn, prompt national governments to pursue even more radical and desperate experiments to revive national growth, further exacerbating the global trend toward disintegration. Both Brenner and his critics lack any sense of this process, much less its political ramifications. But they also share a certain conceptual affinity. As the term suggests, political capitalism is supposed to describe how politics and economics have fused together, with political rent-seeking now responsible for whatever economic activity there is. Yet in their deeper, unexplained assumption that governments cannot do anything to alter their economic fate as handed to them by the problem of overcapacity, Brenner and Riley subscribe to a crude form of economic determinism. As a concept, political capitalism is based on this prior, hard separation of the state from the economy, which is the determining factor. Ironically, the authors share this conceptual dichotomy with progressive economists and the very "neo-Kautskyites" Riley denounces, who, believing that national governments can shake off global constraints through industrial policy, emphasize the other side of the same dichotomy. Both positions obscure a deeper understanding of the conditions that bring about the kind of dramatic renovations of state ideology exemplified by the return of industrial policy, as well as its likely consequences. These conditions are the forces and relations of world capitalist production. Their evolution does not mechanically determine politics, but, in tandem with the latter re-shapes the relations between state and economy in ways that alter the nature of both.

As a global mode of production based on class domination, capitalism depends on the extraction of surplus value from a subordinated class, the world working class, which is the pool from which profits, interest, rent, dividends, and other forms of this surplus are taken. As one of its most basic features, corporations in different countries mechanize their operations to raise their profit rate by increasing labor productivity. As these techniques become generalized, the relative advantage for their early adopters dries up, and a new productivity norm becomes the rate at which businesses must produce to remain competitive. The drive for a new breakthrough in productivity begins. Enormous amounts of profit are produced and realized during this process while deleting workers from it—that is, by getting rid of the real source of profit, labor power. As a result, even as individual corporations rake in more money through investing in machinery, the average rate of profit for all producers declines. The longer this goes on, the lower profitability becomes, reducing the level of investment and further intensifying the pressures of competition.

Economists—like business-people—see market competition as the driver of corporate technological innovation, but the competitive pressures of markets—especially the world market—are as much the consequence as they are a cause of the drive for greater productivity, which tends to outpace what markets can absorb. As the scale of production expands and labor power shrinks as a share of total expenditure by private business, total profits worldwide will also tend to shrink relative to the total invested capital. The resulting fall in industrial profitability is a well-documented empirical trend. In his book Capital Wars, for example, the financial analyst Michael Howell records an overall decline in the returns on industrial capital from 1984–2019 for Germany, the US, and China, with the rate of return in all three countries nearly converging by 2019. Likewise, according to the World Bank, growth rates for industrial "value added" in the three countries have slowly converged on a common downward path since the early 1990s. Value added is the net output of a sector, or total output (sales) minus intermediate inputs (purchased components, energy, raw materials, services), so it serves as an indirect indicator of profitability. Industrial profitability is not important to track for its own sake, but because it is a key indicator of the sector with the historically highest rates of labor productivity. Even if it is not evident to commentators like Levitz, for whom "it is not clear why that sector's peculiar trajectory is of overriding importance," it is perfectly clear to the US government, which is hell bent on reviving this sector even if it means sabotaging its own "allies" and considerably raising the chances for world war. Despite delirious proclamations celebrating the advent of a post-industrial economy during the heyday of

neoliberalism, capital-intensive manufacturing for world markets is still the main engine of capitalist growth. The less profitable it becomes, the less private investment it will attract, requiring more drastic measures on the part of governments to reignite growth in their sputtering, low-productivity economies.

In the long run, declining average rates of profit are the other side of the growing scale of capital investment, of the capitalist pursuit of ever greater productivity. This conflict between productivity and profitability plays out internationally in the competitive arena of the world market, where corporations and their national governments experience it as a problem of foreign competitors. Corporations experience this trend as heightening competitive pressure to remain profitable; governments face it in the increasing difficulty of raising the national rate of growth. The longer this dynamic goes on, the more the global pool of surplus value to be globally divided up shrinks, and the more the world economy is in effect as a zero-sum environment, with growth for some only coming at the expense of others.

Likewise, the thickening concentration of regional production networks, the scale of investment needed to produce at the global technological frontier, and the resulting scarcity of manufacturing profitability are the forces behind the widely observed phenomenon of premature deindustrialization. For the most part, so-called emerging markets are bypassing the second, industrial phase of the traditional cycle of development, in which the transition from a mainly agrarian to an industrial economy raises national incomes and living standards before transitioning to a mostly service-based economy. Given the level of mechanization and capital intensity required at the global standard of production, growth in industrial output no longer correlates with significant employment growth, but does contribute to global pressure on overall profitability. Even traditionally labor-intensive segments of global production networks, such as certain sectors of subcontract manufacturing, are increasingly organized by centralizing monopolies, blocking new entry into potentially more labor-intensive development strategies.33 These deep, tectonic trends effectively mean the end of development, as a comatose system consigns most of the world's population to workless misery.

The return of industrial policy and the onset of premature deindustrialization are two sides of the same historical dynamic: falling worldwide profitability, the thickening concentration of capital, and an expanding population of surplus humans that governments are frightened of but which national economies are unable to absorb. In this context, pursuing “industrial policy,” as the US is doing, simply means destroying one’s competitors, even if it means starting World War III. At least these measures will be accompanied by reassuring homilies about the sanctity of the rules-based international order.

Mask Off

For Bidenomics’s official goal, which is to intervene in the domestic economy to raise its productive capacity, the decline in American industrial competitiveness means it can only achieve that goal by kneecapping its more advanced competitors. As Edward Luce of the Financial Times recognizes, the domestic side of Bidenomics is a byproduct of its main point, which is to throttle China's further development.34 In fact, the latter is a condition for the former: in a global system characterized by increasingly capital- and technology-intensive production standards that left the U.S. behind long ago, making manufacturing in the U.S. profitable at scale, i.e. “re-shoring” it, is only possible by leveraging export restrictions and trade sanctions that basically blackmail manufacturers to avoid further engagement with China. The cooperation of the Dutch company ASML, for example, which manufactures key components for semiconductors, was most likely secured by threatening to withhold the software it relies on, which is made by a US-based company. The larger geoeconomic war against China is backed by some of the biggest corporate interests in the country. It is, for example, strongly supported by much of Silicon Valley, whose manufacturers and services are in danger of being outcompeted by China’s rapidly developing hi-tech sectors.

But US policy is also squarely aimed at undercutting Europe, where the constraints of the EU’s governmental process make a similar “European IRA” exceedingly difficult, if not impossible. Unlike in the US, where senators can closely collaborate with executive officials to crank out legislation acceptable to big business, and thus passable, the European Parliament and the European Commission must juggle the disparate interests of dozens of different countries with internal divisions of their own. EU leaders, reflecting the EU’s constitution, are also still hobbled by a dogged attachment to “market solutions” even at this late date, compounding the difficulty. Of course, the Biden administration was well aware of all of this when it rammed through the IRA. Presidential Senior Advisor Brian Deese's remark that “We should welcome [similar] actions by most countries if they’re structured fairly and scaled appropriately” is either naive or, more likely, just disingenuous.

Nevertheless, the US was compelled to respond to European outrage at its turn to open neo-mercantilism. Forced to make concessions to hold together its shaky alliance against Russia and China, the Biden administration quietly implemented two regulatory changes, by executive action, to the legislation in December 2022 and March 2023. These changes make it

possible for US citizens to access tax credit subsidies for electric vehicles that are not made in the US; under the new rule, if the vehicle is leased rather than purchased, imported cars receive the benefit of the subsidies. This would effectively bypass the “made in America” requirements of the bill for car manufacturing, arguably its most important provision. With leases accounting for over a third of the US market in new electrical vehicles and rising, one of the key employment generators of the IRA may already be dead on arrival. All this reveals how America's geopolitical and economic objectives, as currently understood, are hopelessly in conflict with one another.

In an international setting like this, calls for a “global race to the top” in clean energy development may be honest, if naive; what they are not is realistic. Liberal commentators have bent over backwards to rationalize the US’s descent into solipsistic economic nationalism, insisting that it will actually work out great for the world. Supposedly the IRA will lower costs for key decarbonization technologies, making them available for everyone. But apart from the advertisements offered by officials and their apologists, what this means in reality is this: the US aims to monopolize the production of these and other key technologies for a US-dominated trade bloc of wealthy countries that it leads against its official enemies, principally China. By upgrading its domestic manufacturing capacity through protectionism and—more importantly—geoeconomic warfare, clean energy technologies may eventually be cheaper for other countries to import, but it will be the US, of course, who will be making and supplying them.

In any case, the notion of a cooperative world effort to decarbonize that excludes the world’s leading producer by far of clean energy resources is bound to be a self-defeating exercise. China already accounts for the vast majority of the world's investments in clean energy technology and the cost efficiencies that have accrued from them, but US foreign policy is bent on locking China out of global markets for these and other advanced products, literally at all costs. In the near to mid-term this will drive up prices for these products for everyone by forcing producers to make them outside of the global productivity frontier in the China-centered value chains of East Asia. Far from helping it, the destabilizing effects of US foreign policy will impede the project of decarbonization by dramatically raising its cost.

In a recent speech, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan tried to put forward a coherent rationale for US policy by outlining a “new Washington Consensus.” In the new order, the US will invest in emerging economies through trade deals and international organizations like the World Bank, all while maintaining its customary, undisputed supremacy. Unlike the previous Washington Consensus, when liberalized trade was supposed to be the engine of global development, or the consensus before that, which thought all countries would pass through industrialization on their way to becoming “modernized” economies, we’re assured that this time will be different; this time, global development will really happen. Again, the official self-presentation needs to be distinguished from reality. For low-income countries to have any real opportunities for development, they would need not just foreign capital, but also to have export access to the lucrative markets of North America, Europe, and Japan; it is precisely such access that these countries, above all the US, are moving to close off. The general turn to protectionism in the rich countries will instead consign developing economies to the role of suppliers of raw materials and basic commodities, their traditional, subordinate position in the world hierarchy, forestalling progressive development. Far from alleviating global inequality, this will profoundly exacerbate it.

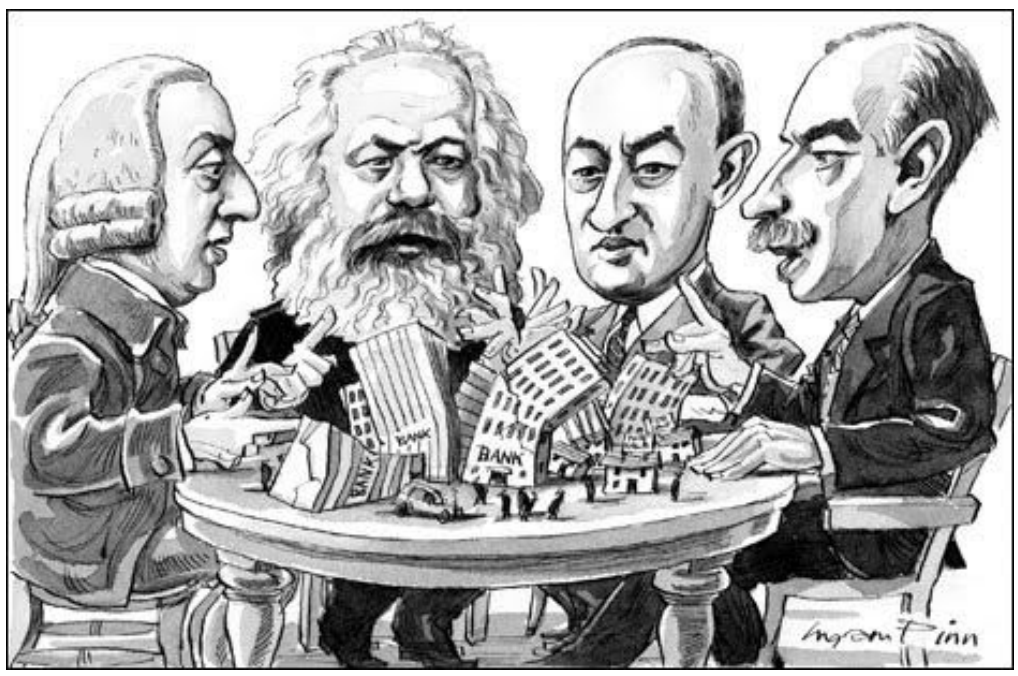
For example, take the “Green Steel Deal,” which unites the EU and US in a commercial agreement to incentivize reduced-carbon steelmaking. It is supposedly open to global participation so long as countries produce steel “fairly,” as defined by US trade law. However, under current law, most steel is “unfairly” traded, due to the presence of “non-market” forces in steel-producing countries, i.e. the same kind of state-support the US itself is of course pursuing on behalf of its own steel industry. Leaving aside China, even if key countries like India or Indonesia produce steel with similar forms of state involvement, their access to the US market will be penalized, making their exports uncompetitive. There is thus no incentive for these countries to join such an agreement, which makes it a non-starter. Through its intensifying protectionism and hypocritical trade laws, the US is still firmly set to “kick away the ladder” for lower and middle income countries, making the New Washington Consensus a mere empty phrase.

Meanwhile, developments on the domestic front could eventually unravel the entire project to reorient the economy around industrial policy. As investors are no doubt aware, the business environment the IRA tries to create is nowhere near politically secure. Domestically, the Democrats’ strategy was to locate most new manufacturing in Republican-controlled states, creating jobs and, so the thinking goes, solidifying the support of Republicans. Demonstrating all the cunning and strategic savvy the Democrats are known for, the legislation has had no such effect, with Republican legislators and governors just as implacably opposed to everything they try to do as ever. The most likely result will be for new factory jobs to make Republican governors and congressional representatives more popular, emboldening their extremism and encouraging them to be even more obstructionist. By not only failing to contest Trumpism but in fact doubling down on its basic principles, the leaders

of the Democratic Party have locked in a general mood of paranoid nationalism, sure to benefit an increasingly hysterical conspiracist right that will thrive in it. Meanwhile, Joe Biden's approval ratings continue to plumb new lows, setting up a rematch with Trump he could very well lose in 2024—an all-around stellar performance by the Dems.

The situation labor confronts is no more favorable. Most new factories are set to come online in Right-to-Work states, where traditional workplace organizing is much more difficult than in states less hostile to trade unions. But perhaps more to the point, the cost of building modern manufacturing complexes for advanced components like semiconductors is so high that a critical producer like the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Corporation, which has been contracted to build the IRA's flagship factory in Arizona, has flatly refused to countenance a unionized workforce. Organizing in these conditions is not impossible, but it will be a seriously uphill battle made even tougher by a government desperate to secure new investments, whatever it takes.

America pursues a "green industrial policy" set to pump more greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere than ever before while making global decarbonization more difficult; it demands that its chief competitors join its international alliance while enacting an economic policy aimed at decimating them; it expects developing countries to join the same alliance, while punishing them for pursuing the kinds of industrial policies it itself is pursuing; and it has placed all its bets for renewing domestic growth and stability on a strategy that virtually guarantees worsening stagnation and global instability. Almost a year after the passage of the "Inflation Reduction Act," inflation remains persistent, US manufacturing is in a slump, and 2023 is turning into a banner year for corporate bankruptcies. The incoherence of US governance is not just the result of its leaders' incompetence, though there is plenty of that, but a consequence of the exhaustion of its own international economic system and the impossibility of overcoming this through economic nationalism, however extreme. As the outcome of a dysfunctional process of elite improvisation, such an "industrial policy" has no rational basis, and cannot be rationally justified. It represents a step in the mutation of contemporary societies into a new stage of state capitalism induced by the long-term decay of the capitalist system itself.



Gonzo economic nationalism will do nothing to alleviate this crisis, and in fact will only make it worse at every level. Self-destructive economic policies ensure the continued deterioration of profit growth worldwide, which in turn means depressed investment and employment growth, which then prompts further, more desperate national experiments. But the failure of capitalism is, in the end, a failure to enforce the regime of class domination it is based upon. As in all previous episodes of world capitalist breakdown, the state must now be enlisted on the behalf of the ruling class to re-impose discipline on the global workforce, to establish a new basis for growth in the class relationship at the heart of the capitalist system. In the end, the breakdown of capitalism is an expression of a breakdown in this relationship, the increasing difficulty of globally reproducing it. If the left's first wave of post-neoliberal strategy pursued electoral tactics to seize a foothold in the state, perhaps the second will see national states as but one vector in a much greater field of global forces, in which new possibilities for class formation will emerge through the disintegration of laboring life as we know it.

Jamie Merchant

The Protagonism of Tenants

What is the role of the socialist tenant organizer? And what is the relationship between the two currents they embody–the tenant and socialist movements? These are the central questions that I will address in this essay.

This discussion arises specifically out of a discursive milieu here in New York City, but one that gets amplified and dragged across the country; namely, the question of the housing crisis–a name, that by using, we take bourgeois narratives at face value. Tracy Rosenthal, one of the founders of the Los Angeles Tenants Union (LATU), reminds us that the language here matters, that calling "this a housing crisis ... benefits the people who design housing, who build housing, who profit from housing, not the people who live in it." Agency, control and protagonism will be central to all that follows. Other terms we could say to replace housing crisis include: the precarious conditions of tenants, the violences and volatilities of real estate, the crisis of gentrification. None of these phenomena are actually new or recent developments–they are ongoing and historically-rooted processes–though the discourse around them often implicitly (otherwise, explicitly) imagines them to be novel. Regardless – housing (particularly here in New York City) and tenancy are the sight of political and economic conflict and strife. People are hurting; people are upset.

So, what is to be done? The bourgeois or liberal answer is expectedly constricted, and has been succinctly summarized and picked apart by my comrade Harry Zehner in his piece calling on socialists to reject the so-called YIMBY-NIMBY binary. This binary forfeits a socialist imagination to the bleak landscape of ECON 101, where all questions of power, class and politics are supplanted by the deities of supply and demand – figures we know to be false idols, as shown by Kevin Rogan, via Piero Sraffa. "If only we had more housing (of any and all types)," argues the self-professed YIMBY, "this housing crisis would be a thing of the past." These YIMBYs (short for Yes-In-My-BackYard) label actual socialists as NIMBYs when we, actual socialists, reject or critique new developments that drive up rents and displace working-class communities. As usual for these parties, foundational socioeconomic concerns like rent, expropriation, and capital accumulation are elided in favor of technocratic tweaks – if we only change the zoning regulations, truly affordable housing will flourish. Affordable for who? This is a question never adequately answered by these folks.

What about the 'socialists?' What are they doing? The Democratic Socialists of America chapter here in NYC has seen a slow but vocal entry of YIMBYism into its ranks. One only needs to peruse their slack channels or attend a forum event to catch whiff of the "pro-housing" stench. This trend most likely can be traced to OPEN NY (ONY), an organization exactly of "pro-housing activists" that uses social justice language to mask unrelenting and uncritical support of development and all the capital interests therein; they are "rezoning sheep in wolf's clothing" – the housing equivalent of bootlickers who celebrate capitalists for their job-creation chops.

Simultaneously, NYC-DSA has shown itself in the last couple years to be inordinately unprepared to engage on the question of housing or tenancy in a manner befitting the socialism in its name. This makes the introduction of YIMBYism all the more concerning, and thus challenging (and squashing) it all the more necessary. I'll present three short notes to highlight this insufficiency and to establish the context necessary for my argument that follows.

The first concerns NYC-DSA member and endorsee Julia Salazar, NY State Senator, who cosponsored the NYCHA (New York City Housing Association) Trust Bill–a bill "that is, in reality, a Trojan Horse for privatization." Salazar did so on her own, without support or input from her socialist organization; this caused much outcry within the organization, particularly from NYC-DSA's NYCHA Solidarity Working-Group.

Second: NYC-DSA elect Tiffany Cabán, City Councilperson, approved a 1,400 unit development in her Queens District, with only 25% of the units slotted to be affordable – again, generating much outcry from actual socialists, while fielding robust praise from the most ghoulish of voices. Cabán's decision to approve this development was not born of socialist reasoning or principle, rather through a self-professed model of 'harm-reduction.'

Both of these instances speak to a lack of organizational discipline and lack of political accountability; both electeds here operated as lone-wolves, rogue liberals, doing what they believed was the best course of action, choosing between difficult options, within the deeply constricted contexts of contemporary civic politics. The unit of analysis here seems, for these electeds, to so often be confined to whatever is in front of them; they are thinking in days, months and years. Lessons from the past – a decade ago, fifty years ago, a hundred – are ignored, and so too, the dynamics that can only be witnessed at such a scale. They are presented with options and react according to their own personal values (which, for the most part, are good! This isn't really about either of them).

We have to, as socialists, understand our movement at multiple and coinciding scales; it's our duty to consider broader historical processes as they intersect with, inform, and underlie pressing political developments. This is all incredibly difficult, which is why such a task cannot and should not be left up to even the most adept solitary politician. This is exactly why we have socialist organization.

Moreover, these instances reveal a fundamental misunderstanding of power. In both of these moments, power is understood to be derived from the office itself – a seat at the table, etc.; we must, as socialists, reject this implication. The election of politicians (as well as the writing and even winning of legislation), though of course dialectically in-relation to the cultivation of mass power, is only ever the reflection of power, which itself resides in the masses of people and is expressed through our organization.

Lenin, who we will return to soon, characterizes the proper social-democratic operative as she "who can generalize all these manifestations into one big picture of ... capitalist exploitation, who is able to use each small affair to set before everybody [her] socialist convictions and [her] democratic demands and to explain to each and all the world-historical significance of the liberation struggle of the proletariat". The burden of living up to Lenin's directive should not rest on the politicians themselves. This is an organizational, not a personal, responsibility–who we endorse, elect and champion is our responsibility.

The third note has less to do with any specific politician, and more to do with organizational orientation. For the last so-many years, NYC-DSA's Housing Working Group has operated as a tail to Housing Justice for All (HJ4A), the dominant nonprofit coalition in New York State. I've critiqued the pitfalls of this particular NGO, and of housing NGOs in general elsewhere, but the summation that is important with regard to the DSA is that by tailing a coalition of nonprofits (which include in their ranks landlords who regularly evict their tenants), this socialist organization forfeits the revolutionary prospects of a socialist housing program or politic. Instead, it goes to bat for nonprofits that might espouse revolutionary aims or dreams but are fundamentally, and evidently, uninterested in a socialist project.

Again, this can and must be understood in terms of protagonism and agency. The coalition is directed by professionals and boards of directors. It is, despite pronunciations to the contrary, not led by members or tenants. When I and a fellow member of the Brooklyn Eviction Defense Tenant Union (an independent organization) were expelled from the nonprofit coalition last summer, it was not at the will of the general membership. Rather, a small cadre of lifelong nonprofit directors, all healthily salaried to oversee the direction of the coalition, voted in secret to expel my comrade and I (neither of whom draw income for this work), without any explanation or prior deliberation with the wider (actually tenant and working-class) membership. What exactly did we do to deserve an expulsion? We voiced criticism and disagreement over the coalition's explicit, and documented, forfeiture of the eviction moratorium and betraying of the Cancel Rent movement in favor of a failed-push for Good Cause. The Cancel Rent movement was a truly bottom-up mass mobilization of tenants and our outrage; it started as the pandemic did and called for the truly radical mass-expunging of arrears. The eviction moratorium was saving peoples' lives. The directors of these nonprofits made the calculated and 'pragmatic' decision to give up on these 'radical' projects in favor of the more "reasonable" Good Cause legislation – legislation that restricts landlords' ability to evict market-rate tenants, but for good cause. That the nonprofits were legitimating evictions in some form was not a concern for them (the specter of harm reduction haunts). This was about results! Deliverables! Realism!

The last coalition meeting that my comrade and I were on before expulsion was a collective reflection of the recently-failed push for Good Cause. Whereas the nonprofit directors led a chorus celebrating the hard work that so many put into the campaign (so many early buses to Albany!), my comrade and I were more interested in reflecting on why and how the campaign failed. What decisions, structures, and politics, we wondered aloud, led to these results? A week or so later, we both received emails alerting us of our expulsion.

Over the last few years, the Venn diagram between HJ4A leadership and NYC-DSA Housing leadership has been a near-perfect circle–a circle named Cea Weaver. A recent cover-page essay in the Nation features Weaver prominently and celebrates HJ4A's new push for Good Cause. Notably, actual organizing – e.g. building out working-class power block by block – is wholly absent from the article – as it is, generally, from HJ4A's program. And yet, an individual wearing a Crown Heights Tenant Union (CHTU) t-shirt is depicted on the magazine's front cover – CHTU (which Weaver cofounded!) is an actual organ of working-class power, and one of the few non-nonprofit members of the HJ4A coalition. Again, and seemingly always, actual collective organization toward power is used as a symbol or a token by liberal nonprofits, rather than recognized as the actual arbiter of historical change that it is. I say this not to take an easy shot at these nonprofits, but to emphasize the inappropriateness of a socialist organization tailing such a formation.

In the past couple weeks, a sign-on letter written by ONY and now signed on by the biggest of the HJ4A member

organizations, such as Make the Road NYC and New York Communities for Change (NYCC) has been circulating housing circles. This letter, and the legislation it champions (which is identical to that of real-estate-backed Kathy Hochul), is prototypical ONY: under the guise of addressing the housing crisis, the plan here calls for an end to exclusionary zoning, in a manner which would open even wider the floodgates of gentrification and luxury development. Crown Heights alone has seen a forced exodus of 19,000 black people in the decade between 2010 and 2020. The letter is, specifically, an eleventh-hour push to tie this end to exclusionary zoning to protections championed by the tenant movement. CHTU has responded to the sign-on letter accordingly, calling on a strict adherence to the democratically decided coalition platform and program. This theme of discipline rears its ugly head again.

It is with this fuller context in mind that I argue thus: it is the role of socialist tenant organizers to work diligently toward the future merger of independent working-class tenant organizations with the socialist movement; that we do so despite all of the complexity, contradiction and morass implied. Before diving into all of the particular reasons as to why this is necessary from both the socialist and the tenant perspectives, first some definition and background of terms and a brief elaboration of theory.

Independent working-class tenant organizations are independent in that they are accountable to worker-tenants and only to worker-tenants. This means that they are not nonprofits or NGOs; they are not subject to the whims of rogue boards of directors and whomever might be pulling their purse strings. They are working-class in that they are composed of and led by working-class tenants–by worker-tenants. Moreover, these organizations are (and must be!) democratic in their functions and their politics. These are location-specific formations – Tenant Unions – that derive their power granularly: organizing building-by-building and block-by-block.

In the last decade, independent tenant unions (sometimes also called autonomous, though I find this term clunky and off-putting) have sprung up all across the country. The first of these (and of which I'm a member) was the Crown Heights Tenant Union, which formed in 2013 in a collaboration between long-term Crown Heights tenants and Occupy Wall Street veterans, with the aim to fight the rapid gentrification of the neighborhood. A year or so later, the Los Angeles Tenants Union (LATU) was founded, and has since flourished, with many vibrant and militant locals across the LA area. Other examples include the Houston Tenants Union and Washington D.C.'s Stomp Out Slumlords organization. In 2020, both the Autonomous Tenant Union Network (ATUN) – a nationwide federation of these independent tenant unions – and Brooklyn Eviction Defense (BED; a Brooklyn-wide Tenant Union, that I helped found!) were established.

It is no coincidence that independent tenant unionism has (re-)emerged in this historical moment. The housing and financial crisis of 2008 in many ways marked the formal closure of the "American Frontier." The dangling carrot of homeownership – of expropriable land and space to be made available for the ideal, "average" American – that had buffeted cycles of US-led capital accumulation evaporated. With no frontier to eject its surplus populations out to, and with increasingly fewer foreign outlets for a vagabond US capitalism to prey upon, the pressures of dispossession and expropriation necessary for continued capital accumulation required new targets. David Harvey's twin theories of the spatial fix and accumulation-by-dispossession reign important here. Private equity – capital embodied – gobbled up many of those single-family homes made vacant and bank-owned by the foreclosure epidemic of the 2008 crisis. Rather than flipping these properties for quick profit, these big capital firms maintained ownership and converted what were once owner-occupied homes into revenue-generating rental assets. This was what Desiree Fields calls the creation of a new asset class. The returns on these assets compelled, of course, more: massive firms began feverishly buying-up and investing in not only single-family homes but large, multi-family rentals as well, like one I live in. While many academics and academic-adjacents call this development the financialization of housing (wherein financial firms assume control over housing ownership and distribution), F.T.C. Manning importantly argues that the correct causal link is inverted – and she argues this with the (admittedly goofy) phrase that it is actually the housingification of finance. Manning's intervention is instructive: rather than housing merely being subject to the whims of finance and financial firms, we ought to understand financial firms as becoming increasingly dependent on rent.

What this all means is that the expropriable pressures characteristic of consistent capital accumulation have attached even more firmly onto the backs of a now even-more-massive tenant class. Tenancy has always been a site of expropriation, this by definition. But the degree and intensity of that expropriation – and with it, the political character of tenancy as a formation – varies in different historical contexts. Ours – defined by a crumbling American Empire, a fully closed frontier, and unrepentant financialization – sees a tenancy simultaneously precarious and over-exploited, but also a tremendous site of socialist potential. Finance's dependence on our rent is, unequivocally, a source of leverage and power – the actualization of which, of course, is contingent upon our organization.

While this iteration of tenant unionism is still relatively nascent, it falls within a rich history of radical

working-class tenant organization; New York, in particular, has a lively tradition, stretching back to the early-to-mid 19th century, of mass organization against the predations of landlordism and rent. The turn of the century saw the advent of socialist- and communist-led tenant unionism. It is from a close study of NYC's tenant history specifically that my argument for a merger is in-part founded.

In arguing for a (certainly not immediate) merger of the tenant and socialist movements, I am referencing the merger formula – derived from the political strategies of Marx, Engels, Kautsky and Lenin; and, more contemporarily, Lars Lih and my fellow comrades in the Marxist Unity Group (MUG).

The merger formula is most simply the merging of socialism, on one hand, and the worker movement on the other. Socialism, here, is the theoretical school of political thought and strategy that can be traced back to the utopian ideals of Robert Owen and that found materialism in Marx. Historically, socialism has been overrepresented by and in bourgeois intellectualism. Socialism, importantly, cannot and should not be reduced to any particular single formation, especially at the current moment; the DSA is certainly not equivalent to socialism writ large, but it is, as the largest socialist organization in over a century in this country an important site of struggle.

On the other hand, "[t]he worker movement," Lih writes, "is neither the proletariat as a whole, nor is it Social Democracy. It is the militant or fighting proletariat – the section of the proletariat animated by a spirit of organized resistance". This section of the proletariat, of worker-tenants, exists in practice; tenant organizers know this intimately. These are the folks in working-class communities who refuse to stand by as landlordism and neoliberal decay attack their places of home and their practices of kinship.

The merger formula is best understood as a dialectically-tied pair of missions – "both the world historical mission of the workers to take power and introduce socialism and the mission of the Social Democrats to merge socialism and the worker movement". Notably, there is an emotional, and even religious affect to this formulation. This is a higher-calling: a formula that, through praxis, elevates local struggles into the world-historic. The religious under-(or over-)tones are not a flaw or romanticization but a necessity; again, as socialists, our attention to scale is paramount.

The merger formula is not a prescription of strict or dogmatic organizational dictates. It is not calling for the subsumption of working-class organization to the theoretical ideas of know-it-all socialists. Rather, in a manner that echoes into the fabric of tenant organizing itself (as will be delved into more below), the merger formula hinges upon relations and relationships. Lih describes this as the Good News interpretation. The socialists are tasked with the responsibility of bringing the good news to the workers. Good news: You, the collective worker-tenants are a world-historical force, in whom alone rests the power to transform the world, to abolish the bosses, the landlords, the petty tyrants; to transform our material conditions, to recreate community. The mere delivery of this news is, of course, not sufficient whatsoever. The structures – both interpersonal and organizational – must be built and tended to so that this Good News can be actually and consequently shared; so that this Good News is not just heard but felt, understood, grasped and rearticulated, disseminated and proclaimed.

Two more important notes before diving into the question of the tenant/socialism merger. The first regards historical contextualization. It is now the year 2023; it is certainly not 1891, when Kautsky wrote the Erfurt Programme, or a decade later (1901) when Lenin wrote What is To Be Done? (WITBD). Conditions are different; contradictions have matured and rearranged. We should take from both an understanding of historical scope – the revolution Lenin was writing toward did not arrive until 16 years after WITBD. Kautsky's near-revolution in Germany didn't come for almost 30 years after his theoretical insight. We need also to recognize the slog of history and struggle.

That said, the primary contradiction that we as contemporary socialists in 2023 (in NYC and in the United States broadly) must engage and overcome, in order to reach a point where a merger becomes feasible, is one of proletarian disorganization. As our comrades in DSA's Communist Caucus write:

> *No left alternative can be realistically offered without militant and active mass working-class organizations across the entire spectrum of capitalist contradictions. No left tendency — not socialism, not communism, nor serious strands of anarchism — can survive without its integration into an organized working-class movement; for a left formation without an organized proletariat is a fish out of water — a politics defined by its atrophy and destined for a slow death.*

That is to say, for a merger – or more aptly, mergers – of the sort Lenin argues for in WITBD, there need to be appropriate mass-organizational vehicles. Institutions of self-organization of worker-tenants (and with them, robust class consciousness) did not disappear naturally (working-class institutions did not just wither away); rather, neoliberalism is the story of their systematic decimation. It is our duty as socialists, then, to participate in the reconstruction of proletarian organization. These are not merely labor unions; though, of course, worker

organization is centrally important. They also include abolitionist organizations, community-control organizations, tenant unions, formations of climate resistance, Indigenous organizations, anticolonial and anti-imperial organizations, homeless unions, undocumented worker unions, and more. The merger formula of 2023 is necessarily attendant to the multitude of struggles that compose working-class resistance today.

The second note springs off of this and relates to spontaneity. Proletarian self-organization of a mass character, similarly, does not just arise naturally as an instinctual response to capitalist exploitation or expropriation. Worker-tenants always have and always will resist the oppressions and violences of capital. But resistance in-itself does not constitute the construction of a new world; it must, in fact, be imbued with that sort of higher calling, with that extended and expansive scope. My comrade Cliff Conolly is very helpful on this subject when he writes:

> *[I]t is of utmost importance to recognize that the soviets, factory committees, and militias that formed the backbone of the Russian revolution were built intentionally by socialists. While different factions in the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party eventually split into separate organizations as the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, both groups were instrumental in the creation of these mass organizations. They did not emerge organically from economic struggles with bosses and feudal landlords like some of the trade unions and peasant associations, but instead were the product of a socialist intervention in economic struggles which emphasized the need for political organization.*

While at one valence the concept of the merger formula might suggest that the worker-tenants and the socialists compose two distinct camps, it is important to hold onto Cliff's lesson: that in absence of independent working-class organization, it is the socialist's responsibility to help build these, and to become an active member within them. Moreover, Cliff reminds us that mere participation in the production of these institutions is not sufficient: "The lesson to learn from the Bolsheviks is this: we must win political hegemony in whatever independent organs of proletarian power that we help build, using every available means, including running opposition candidates in bourgeois elections to expose broader sections of the class to our ideas." We must help build up these independent institutions, we must establish them as truly democratic and only through that can the Good News be dutifully shared and actually spread.

We can then move more specifically to the conceptual merger of the tenant movement in NYC with that of the city's socialist movement. This is a merger that is not only mutually beneficial or symbiotic, but an actual historical necessity for both movements.

In my estimation, the emergent independent tenant movement has two paths to actual sustainability. The first path is that all of us organizers – those of us who are inordinately invested in this movement and in the organizations that compose it – choose our own self-interest and professionalize. We have accumulated the knowledges, the bureaucratic know-hows and the languages necessary. To do this, either our organizations themselves incorporate as NGOs (with all of the trappings therein) or we get jobs that cause the boundaries between our independent organizations and the nearby nonprofits to blur. Many of the current housing nonprofits in New York City (e.g. Met Council on Housing) are examples of the former. In fact, New York City's tenant history is littered with radicals-turned-professionals, with base-building giving way to clientelism. NYC-DSA's current and recent housing leadership and program fit the latter, as expounded above.

The second path is to work toward this merger – for us organizers to become participants in the construction of a socialist New York City. And this is, of course, the only appropriate choice.

This merger is entirely necessary from the perspective of the tenant movement. For one: our antagonists, landlords and real estate, have already more-than-completed a merger of their own – that merger with finance capital, otherwise known as the 'financialization of housing.' For the tenant movement to remain narrowly focused in the face of such integrated class foes would be to circumscribe our struggle and limit our capabilities as a movement to the current political realities; as we grow, so too must the tools at our disposal develop. That is to say: the hammers we have as tenants to actually attack and dismantle landed capital's stranglehold over the political economy and the organization of our lives are and will remain incredibly limited. Socialism is how the tenant movement retools its armory – how we come to control how and where we live.

But this merger is a tricky thing. Its contours operate in multiple, dialectical ranges. On one hand, we as socialist tenant organizers have to help seed and build organizations that functionally recognize working-class tenants as the rightful historical protagonists of this movement. We have to be (and I think, for the most part, we really are, so far) building organizations that are structurally and principally up to that task. That means these organizations have to be truly democratic and truly independent: these have to be vessels of and for working-class power. These organizations themselves must be democratic in their functions and in their relationships to place, time and people. Democratic here means they have to be integrated consciously into historically-situated and unique cultures and

communities; democratic means building relationships so as to understand how to actively foster democratic participation, e.g. protagonism, in any given context; it is not always the same. We do not just plop down structures and protocols (and politics) but, through inquiry and repetition, help develop practices of democracy: of collective decision-making (and often also disagreeing, critiquing, rediscussing) of matters relevant and pressing. These organizations that we're building have to be independent from local NGO's, political machines (even our own) and other interest groups. This is not because all of these formations are inherently antithetical to our project, but because a union of this sort must be wholly and exclusively accountable to its base: which is always composed of organized worker-tenants.

Then, as alluded to above, we have to win the people and these institutions with visions of this merger – with our good news, with socialism. That means, as we help build out these institutions we also have to be setting the foundations for the internal struggle toward socialism. This doesn't mean pushing Marxist tomes onto folks and really doesn't even just mean political education; political education too often in contemporary left-activist scenes means cliquish reading groups. Popular, protagonistic education is closer to it. What does this mean exactly? Lenin writes that "the self-knowledge of the worker class is inextricably tied to full clarity in its conceptions of the mutual relations of all classes of present-day society – conceptions that are not only theoretical... more precisely, not so much theoretical as they are worked out via experience of political life". The tenant union, and the tenant associations that compose it, are the grounds in which the worker-class, the worker-tenants, can compile, contain, sharpen and practice these practical analyses of class relations; the tenant union is a vehicle in which the experiences of political life Lenin writes of take place, over and over. Through the struggle of one tenant association, as it then relates to the struggle of the tenant association down the street, through the clarity borne through shared-constellating struggle, the mutual relations of all classes are brought forth.

This is how we show and share that socialism, as it echoes out from the most local of shops and apartment buildings, is a powerful tool – in fact, the only tool – for worker-tenant liberation and a reclamation of the many publics taken from us. This has to be done slowly and with persistence; it has to be done soberly, with intensive study and reflection; the world becomes more complicated each day and we can only apply Marxism to terrains we know intimately.

Michael Denning, speaking on Italian revolutionary Antonio Gramsci, is very helpful here:

> *For him, the challenge for the philosophy of praxis, for Marxism, for his Communist Party, is to create a conception of the world that is accessible both to the young militants, still barely literate, barely numerate, who are coming in because of the oppression of their daily life and daily work, and also the intellectuals who are contesting and battling. Throughout the Prison Notebooks, he's got this double sense. We have two tasks: popular education and the combating of dominant ideologies at the highest level...*
>
> *But he says that's not enough. You can't leave people at that position of pure faith. A party that actually wants to turn people into self-determining rulers of their own society has to actually criticize that common sense, raise people in it, raise oneself out of that rarefied common sense, those Stone Age traces, and instead understand in the good sense: out of one's experience of work, out of one's experience of politics, out of one's experience of one's own household life and neighborhood life.*

Herein lies some of the difficulties and messiness. The dialectical task of both transcending the localist struggle (to beat back an eviction, to hire more building staff, to reduce a rent) toward the emancipatory, while also always grounding that emancipatory vision in the very localist struggle we are engaged in. This notion of common sense is not something that is combatted merely through formal organization: through meetings, pamphlets, organizational structure, or votes. Rather, common sense is produced daily; it is enmeshed within (and is constituent of) social reproduction. Common sense is found and articulated in our daily maneuverings. Intervention into common sense, then, must be environmental and quotidian, consistent and repetitious.

Tenant organizing is a local, rooted and intimate practice. We tenant organizers are welcomed into people's homes; we work in building lobbies and on front stoops; our places of operation are in courtyards and on rooftops, in stairwells and hallways [Sadiyia Hartman writes: "They didn't know that the hallway and the stairwell were places of assembly, a clearing inside the tenement, or that you love in doorways."].

We are cooking with tenants, holding space and community with tenants in their home, and most importantly, struggling alongside tenants (as tenants, too) to gain control over how and where they (and we all) live. All of this, as life dictates, is always clumped together; the strategizing takes place over shared food – the potluck form permeates and symbolizes: people come to the meeting, each bringing their own thing, their own dish, their own set of grievances and list of misrepairs. And then we share. We pass around and confer. We recognize shared interests and convert that recognition into action. That action –small, like planning a day of outreach; larger, like announcing a rent strike! – then rebounds to produce more recognition of shared interest. And always, we keep each other fed.

Tenant organizers encounter and intervene into what geographer Cindi Katz calls "the fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life" – social reproduction – where common sense is performed and produced. Katz' work is a continual recognition of the revolutionary potential of social reproduction: that it is within the mundane and the daily that revolutionary culture can be, and is, produced. Social reproduction refers, in the Marxist sense, to the complete collection of activities, norms, relations and institutions necessary for the continual reproduction of a mode of production. Everything required for a worker-tenant to be in the position to rise daily to sell her labor, and later, pay her rent – this is social reproduction.

Tenant organizing, particularly principled socialist tenant organizing, keys into the fabric of social reproduction, and engages practically with (and contests) how this fabric is constantly unraveled by capital. When Lenin writes of the importance of "drawing in" the masses to political struggle through more than just sites of economic oppression, the importance of organizing "an all-sided political indictment" that attends to "each and every manifestation of police oppression and autocratic outrage", and that the oppression of capital "appears in the most various areas of life and activity", he is gesturing toward this holistic social reproduction.5 Tenant organizing, particularly in New York City – and particularly within the contexts of gig-labor, bureaucratized unions and proletarian disorganization – is a means to harness practically and collectively this all-sided political indictment.

Katz writes that "[f]ocusing on social reproduction allows us to address questions of the making, maintenance, and exploitation of a fluidly differentiated labor force, the productions (and destructions) of nature, and the means to create alternative geographies of opposition to globalized capitalism." Katz and Lenin are saying the same thing and provide instruction to us socialist organizers: our organizational projects must extend out far into the disparate, distant tangents of peoples' lives. The tenant movement must grow extensively (covering more-and-more buildings on more-and-more blocks) and intensively. This means the movement must grow its presence further into working peoples' lives. This isn't an abstraction or a romanticization, but a very practical lesson. One way that tenant organizers practice this is through the offering of childcare at union events. This is a very simple and meaningful organizational habit; it is welcoming and helps integrate people into unions. Moreover, it is an absolute necessity, seeing as the tenant movement is one led by working-class women. The Tenant Union is for the whole family. The family, this thing of social reproduction, the substance (the flesh, the humanness, the dailiness) that fills the structures and relations of everyday life – is what the tenant movement attends to and is what the socialist movement needs. In the equation of the merger we are concerned with here, then, the tenant movement, in effect, brings the body and soul to the skeleton of socialist politics and socialist theory.

The above are the basic characteristics necessary for the tenant movement to be 'ready' to merge with the socialist movement.

On the other hand, for this merger to happen, the socialist movement with which these independent working-class tenant unions are supposed to merge also has to be truly democratic and truly independent. This, similarly, is no small task. Our work then, as socialist tenant organizers, has to be on multiple fronts at once. We have to build this tenant movement and this socialist movement; if we are DSA members, that means that we have to struggle for an independent and democratic socialist organization – independent of NGO's and the Democratic Party, democratic in our principles and program, and democratic in our internal functions, structures and culture.

To build a democratic and independent DSA requires profoundly reassessing fundamental aspects of the organization. This includes reversing our tendency to tailism and divorcing ourselves from the bourgeois Democratic Party. More: the culture of the organization has to be pushed toward this democratic, independent horizon; it has to be implemented and cultivated, not just in our meetings, but in everything we do. We need an organization where rank-and-file members, and particularly newer, working-class, black and brown members are not just welcomed but imbued with protagonism. We have to study how this has been done and experiment with how this can be done! We have to produce a robust culture of critique, debate and discussion. Organizational decisions not only have to appear transparent or democratic but actually be so. This is, again, not easy. It requires much trial, error, and about-face. We as socialists in New York City run up against many of the most powerful capitalist formations in

the world. We have to be deeply sober about how tremendous of a task we have ahead of us. We cannot be content with creating and maintaining an organization that provides meaning and sociality to (generally well-meaning, downwardly-mobile) middle- or upper-class (mostly white) socialists. We have to carefully, and with principle, identify and interrogate our organizational contradictions, including those regarding race and class. We cannot be scared of these contradictions – that fear perpetuates them.

But tenant organizations across the country are showing us that independent and democratic working-class organization works. Not only this, but independent organization of this sort is necessary, warmly welcomed and already happening in so many ways – most of the time, as organizers, it's our role to knock on some doors and then get out of the way. This is one of the fundamental dialectics of socialist tenant organizing: at once creating these tethers between tenants, between buildings and neighborhoods and between the tenant movement and socialism; while all the same, mostly staying out of the way and letting tenants – our historical protagonists – guide.

These organizations provide us tangible templates of actual, practical democracy and organizational independence that we can use as models within the DSA. We need to support and uphold these organizations so we can, as we engage in the arduous and unenviable struggle of refashioning the DSA toward these ideals, show those who might be doubtful that this does work and is in fact our only path forward. These are a democracy and an independence that are tethered to actual community, that are discovered there and always grounded there. This is, I think, the most important aspect – the merger not merely of tenant organization and socialism, but of democracy and community.

The DSA here in NYC is famously unrooted. It operates so often in a game of politics-from-above, which masks a pervasive transience of its membership. The ideas are all there. The 'fixes' needed are understood and recognized, the legislative course mapped out (Good Cause + Tax the Rich = Socialism in One City). But correct ideas mean very little without power to employ, enforce and actualize them. And power for socialists – it bears repeating – comes only through bottom-up organization. Power is not derived from having a seat at the table or from being let into the room where zoning decisions are made (though these arenas can certainly influence power-building efforts). Rather, power exists amongst the indeterminate stuff of everyday life. Power is harnessed through actually building real organization founded upon and containing real relationships with people where they live, of compelling people to engage in active democracy within their homes and on their blocks, and of building out the organizational infrastructure worthy of the power already existing in working-class communities. It is always our organization that determines our collective capabilities (to enforce our rights, to act as a class, and to assume stewardship over our historical moment).

Comrade Holden in a report from the New York Tenants Movement.

Right: *African-Americans march for equal housing in New York City.*
Above: *Tenant activists call for a rent freeze.*

For Communism, Against Capitalism

Upcoming Events

Coffee with Comrades
an informal social meet
The Press Bookhouse
Newcastle NSW
Every Wednesday, 10am-12pm

Talking Reds
a socialist discussion group
@ the Burrow
West End, Brisbane
First Saturday of the Month, 2pm

Protest the AUKUS Agreement
@ the ALP National Conference
Brisbane Convention Centre
18th of August, 8am

Gay Liberation Bloc
@ Brisbane Pride
23rd of September

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